

A STUDY OF THE VIEWS OF MAJOR EIGHTEENTH CENTURY EVANGELICALS
ON SLAVERY AND RACE, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO JOHN WESLEY

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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The rise of the British antislavery movement was the result of a complex interplay of a number of influences and factors. One of these factors was the resurgence of evangelical Christianity in the mid-eighteenth century. All of the eighteenth century antislavery leaders were committed churchmen; most of them were staunch Evangelicals. It is the purpose of this study to examine selected attitudes and motives of the most significant antislavery leaders.

The first part of the thesis deals with William Wilberforce, John Newton, Thomas Clarkson, James Ramsay, Granville Sharp, Anthony Benezet and John Wesley, exploring the following issues:

Their attitudes toward the institution of slavery; In order to understand them either as "humanitarians," or as "reformers," it is imperative to know whether they spoke against the institution of slavery on principle, or whether they opposed the harsh treatment and abuses of West Indian slavery as it existed. If the latter, they would work to ameliorate plantation conditions, and end the slave trade. If the former, they could not be content until all slaves were emancipated. The question takes on more interest because most of the abolitionists began their campaigns by attacking the slave trade, not slavery per se.

Their attitudes toward the idea of negro inferiority; The eighteenth century saw the development of modern racial attitudes, or "racism." Part II of the Introduction gives an overview of this development, its relationship to "science," and its implications for slavery and philosophy of missions. The positions of the abolitionists on the question of negro inferiority are crucial to their stance on the slave trade, slavery and the Christianisation of Africans. These are investigated with regard to the actual or potential equality of the negro physically, intellectually and spiritually.

The motives for engaging in the cause of antislavery; The fact that each of the abolitionists in the study considered himself to be a committed Christian makes it relevant to explore the extent to which his faith was

related to his antislavery activity. This question further relates to the nature of the Evangelicalism of that period, and how it viewed Christians' responsibility toward social problems.

The above three issues are explored primarily by critical analysis and interpretation of the antislavery writings of the abolitionists.

The second part of the thesis focuses on Wesley's distinctive theology and its possible relationship to the growing antislavery thought of the late eighteenth century. His doctrines of depravity, prevenient grace, free will, Christian perfection, and his theme of stewardship are reviewed and then examined with a view to gaining a more comprehensive understanding of his doctrine of man. Because of this emphasis, a typescript of Wesley's unpublished manuscript sermon on Genesis 1:27 ("So God Created Man in His Own Image") is included in the appendix. Within each doctrine (or theme) implications are discovered for the question of slavery both from the perspective of the nature of man and of the nature of the Christian. Beyond the issue of slavery, Wesley's theology is seen as the basis of his total social ethic, and his philosophy of social change is described.

Finally, Wesley's contribution to antislavery is evaluated in the light of the observed similarities between his major teachings and the apparent motivation of the abolitionists. Further, his influence on the general values and mood of England is looked at in awareness of the spread of popular attitudes which were conducive to the increase of antislavery sympathy and concern. In this, Wesley is seen as one of those who contributed to the growth of the antislavery movement and to the receptivity of the populace to the work of that movement.

Declaration:

I hereby affirm that both the research and the composition of this thesis are my own work, conducted under the guidance of my supervisor.

Irv Brendlinger

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INTRODUCTION

I

Purpose of the Study

The problem of men dominating and using their fellows for selfish gain is as old as the history of mankind. It has found expression in many forms, but one of the cruelest, most obvious and persistent has been the practice of slavery. The modern institution of black slavery epitomised man's injustice and lack of mercy to man, and it succeeded in wooing political, social and economic theory as well as religion to justify and protect its existence. So entrenched and accepted was the rationale for black slavery that to bring about its downfall required a long and arduous task involving many factors.

From its origins, with John Hawkins transporting a relatively small number of blacks from Africa in the sixteenth century to the full-blown British African slave trade of the mid-eighteenth century, a few isolated voices spoke out in protest. It was not until the late eighteenth century that an antislavery "movement" as such came forth. Clearly, its development was the result of many influences, but it is the contention of the present writer that one of the major influences was the resurgence of evangelical Christianity. Certainly those who played dominant roles in the antislavery movement were connected to the Church, and most of them to the evangelical branch.

It is the purpose of this study to examine select attitudes of the major eighteenth century Evangelical abolitionists. Those covered include William Wilberforce, John Newton, Thomas Clarkson, James Ramsay, Granville Sharp, Anthony Benezet and John Wesley. Although not technically an "Evangelical," James Ramsay is included in the study because of his key role as one of the first abolitionists who had been an eye witness to West Indian slavery. Further, he appears to have had many of the

qualities of the earlier Pietists and thus represents the attitude and influence which older Pietism had in regard to slavery. This strain must be considered as one facet, even if less dominant than the vital role played by the Quakers and the evangelicals. It is likely that Ramsay is similar in theology and outlook to Wesley prior to his 1738 "awakening."

Likewise, Anthony Benezet cannot be considered an "Evangelical," but as a Quaker, he was firmly within the tradition of radical Protestantism. His antislavery influence on the Evangelical abolitionists is indisputable. He was clearly influential for both American and British abolition, serving as a link between Enlightenment thought, particularly the Scottish Philosophes, and the English abolitionists.

The attitudes examined include those related to slavery as an institution, race, and personal involvement in the antislavery cause:

- 1) The eighteenth century saw a wide variety of attitudes toward the institution of slavery, from reasoned support, to unquestioning acceptance, to overt rejection. These positions were likely to be held by both Christians and non-Christians. More to the point, among those who spoke against slavery or the slave trade were two kinds of voices: those who opposed slavery on principle, and those who opposed the harsh conditions and abuses it fostered. Occasionally, abolitionists (especially Wilberforce) are accused of failing to oppose slavery as an institution. They are seen as humanitarians, not social reformers whose main concern was to improve the slaves' conditions, but not to destroy the institution. Because this position was true of many eighteenth century people (notably, George Whitefield) it seemed important to examine the abolitionists of this study regarding their actual attitudes toward the institution of slavery.

2) Closely related to the subject's attitude toward slavery is his view of the negro race. Whether or not the negro is seen as totally human and equal to the white man has unavoidable implications on the question of slavery. The degree of his spiritual potential likewise implies how he can be treated and the parameters of Christians' responsibility towards him. The second consideration of the first seven chapters explores the abolitionists' responses to the idea of negro inferiority.

3) Each of the abolitionists is finally studied with a view to discovering his reasons for being involved in the antislavery cause. What was his motivation? Was it purely a humanitarian concern, or was it more directly related to his Christian faith?

A further purpose of the thesis relates to John Wesley. In one sense he is neither an "Evangelical," nor an abolitionist. In another sense he is both. Until his death he considered himself a loyal son of the Church of England, and a faithful Evangelical. Although the Methodist movement sprang up around him, and he directed its organisation so as to ensure its growth and continuance, he considered it to be an arm of the established church and always hoped that she would reclaim his followers and incorporate their life into her own. By virtue of the time he actually invested directly in abolition concerns, he could not be called an abolitionist, but other considerations reflect a different perspective. He was one of the early spokesmen to articulate direct opposition to both slavery and the slave trade, and he remained closely aligned with the abolitionists. More important, he promulgated values and doctrines which were sympathetic to and supportive of the tenets of antislavery.

In pursuance of the last point, Wesley's distinctive doctrines are reviewed and examined in order to discover inherent implications that relate to the question of slavery. The result is twofold: to determine whether Wesley's antislavery stand was a direct result of his theology, or whether it was an unrelated concern; and to establish whether Wesley's theology (which he successfully spread across England) can be considered a preparation or kind of "seedbed" for the development and acceptance of antislavery thought across the nation.

The study of Wesley's theology comes together with the research into the other abolitionists particularly at the point of their motivation for serving the antislavery cause. As the study progresses it becomes apparent that their motivation is compatible, even related to the doctrines which Wesley taught and emphasised as inseparable from true Christianity. This is seen to demonstrate correlation more than causation, but even as such it is significant.

II

The Concepts of Race and Racism

A word of introduction and definition is in order in regard to the examining of eighteenth century attitudes toward race, and specifically the idea of negro inferiority. Because of the width of interpretation and variance of definitions attached to the terms, it is well first to give a general overview of the development of racial thinking, and to establish meanings for the terms used in the study.

From earliest times, mankind has possessed a "racial consciousness;" he was aware of obvious physical differences. Curtin suggests that as a result of the differences, some have assumed that they were a "chosen people," some that they alone were human, but "most have assumed that people of their own type were physically or mentally or culturally

superior to other races."¹

As well as racial awareness, speculation about the causes of racial differences goes far back into man's history. Aristotle thought that physical and temperamental differences could be attributed to climatic conditions.² As early as 1520 Paracelsus suggested a theory of polygenesis: Adam's descendents constituted only a small part of the earth's inhabitants; negroes and others had a totally separate origin.³ But in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the actual ". . . study of race differences, like the study of biology itself, was in its infancy."⁴ For the most part, people accepted differences and similarities within the animal and plant kingdoms with little or no questioning; they were simply attributed to God's creative genius.⁵

At this point a simplified chronology of the development of racial thought will be helpful. The seventeenth century saw the emergence of theories to explain racial differences. Jean Bodin of France explained all human differences by a complicated system involving geography, climate and astrology.⁶ In 1655, Peyrere posited two distinct creations, a "pre-Adamite" from which come Asians, Africans and Indians, and subsequently the creation of Adam and Eve.⁷ Perhaps the

¹Philip D. Curtin; The Image of Africa, British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850, (Madison, 1964), p. 29.

²Thomas F. Gossett, Race: The History of An Idea in America (New York, 1973), p. 6.

³Ibid., p. 15.

⁴Ibid., p. 34.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 14.

⁷Curtin, op. cit., p. 41. See also Gossett, op. cit., p. 15.

first attempt to classify all human races came from the French physician Francois Bernier in 1684. His groups included "Europeans," "far Easterners," "Blacks," and "Lapps," and were based on body structure and facial features.⁸

In the eighteenth century a distinction was made between species and varieties. The latter were members of the same species which had modified in appearance because of climate or geography, while the former were considered "separate thoughts in the mind of God."⁹ In 1735 Linnaeus divided man into the following varieties: *Homo Europaeus*, *Homo Asiaticus*, *Homo Afer*, and *Homo Americanus*.¹⁰ In Buffon's study (from 1749 to 1804) the white race constituted the "norm," upon which other races were variations (although of the same species).¹¹ While Buffon noted that negroes were quite primitive and had "little genius," he attributed racial differences to climate. He believed that living in Europe over a long period of time would lighten their skin colour.¹²

In 1774 Lord Kames, a Scottish jurist, posited different species of men.¹³ He reasoned that if there had only been one species at creation, the others must have been re-created at a later time which he suggested to be the Tower of Babel incident.¹⁴ Near the same time (1772) Samuel Estwick, Member of Parliament for Westbury also held that

⁸Gossett, op. cit., p. 32.

⁹Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., p. 36.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Curtin, op. cit., p. 42; Gossett, op. cit., p. 45.

¹⁴Gossett, op. cit., p. 47.

there were different species of men.¹⁵ Citing a Mr. Guthrie he noted that the negroes had not developed over the past two thousand years, and had "nothing about humanity about them but their form."¹⁶ He reasoned that perhaps "nature has placed some insuperable barrier between the natives of this division of Africa and the inhabitants of Europe," or they had degenerated to being incapable of civil and scientific progress.¹⁷ So different from and inferior to whites were the negroes that Estwick wanted them kept out of England to "preserve the race of Britons from stain and contamination."¹⁸

Of great significance in this period is Edward Long's History of Jamaica, 1774. He also subscribed to polygenesis:

. . . Long tried to assess the place of the Negro in nature, drawing partly on Buffon and partly on the xenophobia natural to his home, where lines of caste and race ran parallel. Africans, in his opinion were "brutish, ignorant, idle, crafty, treacherous, bloody, thievish, mistrustful, superstitious people." Their skins were dark, their features different, and they had "a covering of wool, like the bestial fleece, instead of hair." They were inferior in "faculties of mind," had a "bestial and fetid smell," and were even parasitized by black lice instead of the lighter-colored lice of the Europeans. All of this was common prejudice of the West Indies. 19

Living in Jamaica, Long cited "evidence" from his own observation for his arguments. His importance lies in "the fact that he gave prejudice the backing of technical biological arguments."²⁰ He supported his claim of

¹⁵ Samuel Estwick, Considerations on the Negro Cause Commonly So Called, third edition, (London, 1778) p. 74. Estwick's first edition was written in December of 1772.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 79-80.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 95.

¹⁹ Curtin, op. cit., p. 43. (these comments come from History of Jamaica, Vol. II, pp. 354, 352.)

²⁰ Ibid.

different species by noting that children of two mulatto parents were themselves infertile.²¹ His "empirical" and "scientific" approach would be foundational to later pseudo-scientific racism and his reasoning provided useful and weighty arguments for those desiring to prove the "fact" of negro inferiority.²²

One of those influenced by Long was the Manchester physician, Charles White, who "most clearly developed scientific arguments in favor of the idea of the multiple origin of races."²³ While not suggesting evolution White saw all of creation arranged in a "great chain of being" with the negro placed as a species between the white man and the ape.²⁴ Although the idea of separate species was used extensively in the nineteenth century (especially to defend slavery)²⁵ it was not generally accepted in the eighteenth century: "The majority view of the biological writers was still monogenesis, but monogenesis with strong overtones of racial pride."²⁶

In Germany, 1795, Blumenbach, a physician divided mankind into five varieties: Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and Malay. He spent his life studying the difference in races and strongly opposed the notion that races were superior or inferior to one another.²⁷

²¹ Ibid., p. 44.

²² Ibid., p. 45. See also David Brion Davis, The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture, (Ithaca, 1966), pp. 260, 279, 461, 463, for a discussion of Long's significance.

²³ Gossett, op. cit., p. 47; Curtin, op. cit., p. 46.

²⁴ Gossett, op. cit., p. 48.

²⁵ Gossett indicates that the polygenesis arguments of Voltaire, Kames and White "were to be repeated ad nauseam in the nineteenth-century defenses of slavery." (p. 51)

²⁶ Curtin, op. cit., p. 46.

²⁷ Gossett, op. cit., pp. 37-39.

Curtin points out that by the late eighteenth century Europeans had had contact with Africans for several centuries and "believed that African skin color, hair texture, and facial features were associated in some way with the African way of life (in Africa) and the status of slavery (in the Americas).²⁸ This could be termed "culture prejudice;" the culture of a person is assumed merely from his physical appearance. But in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, we see (particularly in the writings of Long and White) a most significant development: the identification of colour with culture, leading to an early form of overt racism:

Once this association was made /culture from colour/, the racial views became unconsciously linked with social views, and with the common assessment of African culture. Culture prejudice thus slid off easily toward color prejudice, and the two were frequently blended in ways that were imprecise 29

It is notable that this development followed closely an early wave of antislavery sentiment (Benezet's pamphlets and the Somerset case of 1772), and perhaps fulfilled the intimation of Morgan Godwyn (1680) that "it was in the interest of planters and traders to propagate the belief that Africans were not really men."³⁰ Certainly Estwick was already applying this logic in his advice to Lord Mansfield regarding the Somerset case: ". . . supposing that they /negroes/ were an inferior race of people, the conclusion was, to follow the commerical genius of

²⁸Curtin, op. cit., p. 30.

²⁹Ibid. Curtin also states that the failure to distinguish between culture and race was "the crucial weakness of the anti-racist case in the early nineteenth century." "It not only weakened the public arguments of those who wished to stem the rising tide of racism; it also led serious scholars of good will into an acceptance of racial doctrines." (Curtin, p. 386)

³⁰Davis, op. cit., p. 453.

this country, in enacting that they should be considered and distinguished (as they are) as articles of trade and commerce only."³¹ Here we find illustrated Gossett's thesis of the "importance of Negro slavery in generating race theories" He states that: ". . . the theory of any political or social institution is likely to develop only when it comes under attack"³² Again, evidence that racist theories were emerging is seen in articles written to refute them. One such is contained in The Bee, February 20, 1793, where it is argued that "'the powers of the mind are disconnected with the colour of the skin.'"³³ Likewise in the first part of the present study will be found the refutations of antislavery men between 1772 and 1800. Their describing the cycle of slavery and negro inferiority (as an explanation of negro traits) particularly indicates that racist theories were being posited.³⁴

However, it is left for the nineteenth century to witness the full development of racism. While feelings of cultural or mental superiority to other races may be forms of racism, Curtin suggests that

. . . they need to be kept separate from the full-blown pseudo-scientific racism which dominated so much of European thought between the 1840's and the 1940's. The difference lay in the fact that "science," the body of

³¹Estwick, op. cit., p. 82.

³²Gossett, op. cit., p. 29.

³³Wyllie Sypher, Guinea's Captive Kings: British Anti-Slavery Literature of the XVIIIth Century, (Chapel Hill, 1942), p. 51.

³⁴Quite apart from the biological theories the literary defence of non-whites was developing. By the 1760's the noble savage theme was fully developed in England, giving highest acclaim to the American Indian. (Curtin, p. 49.) By the nineteenth century, the theme had largely died out, with occasional reappearances throughout the first half of the nineteenth century (Curtin, p. 51). It was a literary convention, not a rationally supported affirmation about savage life.

knowledge rationally derived from empirical observation, then supported the proposition that race was one of the principal determinants of attitude, endowments, capabilities, and inherent tendencies among human beings. Race thus seemed to determine the course of human history. 35

Early race theories were based on what was at least thought to be scientific findings, although the "facts" were in error. But when later scientific findings revealed these errors, racist theories were maintained, still claiming the backing of science. This is pseudo-scientific racism; it has continued into the twentieth century.³⁶ In the early nineteenth century an influential step was taken to link physical traits to mental ability. It was called phrenology and related different "faculties" to specific areas of the brain. Thus external dimensions of the head could supposedly reveal abilities and character;³⁷ it was one more theory that made the tenets of racism appear rational.

In 1846 a thoroughly racial theory of history was put forth by Dr. Robert Knox in his book, Races of Man.³⁸ Curtin calls him the "real founder of British racism and one of the key figures in the general Western movement toward a dogmatic pseudo-scientific racism."³⁹ Knox felt that human affairs must be understood in terms of race: "'Race is everything: literature, science, art - in a word, civilization depends on it.'"⁴⁰

³⁵Curtin, op. cit., p. 29.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., p. 234.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 377-8.

³⁹Ibid., p. 377.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 378, quoting Robert Knox, Races of Man: a Fragment, 2nd ed. (London, 1862), p. v.

In the present study which deals mainly with the last half of the eighteenth century, the general position is that theories of overt racism were just beginning to appear from about 1772. While the general populace would have acquaintance with negroes, noting differences and perhaps emotionally making assumptions because of those differences, the assumptions were more a result of culture prejudice than race prejudice. The term used in this context is "pre-racial" indicating that although attitudes could be prejudicial, they were not based on a preconceived racial theory. From about the 1840's (it is impossible to set a specific date) a "racial" period can be established. Assumptions were based primarily on race. Race was seen as the determining factor in all of culture and history. It should be noted however, that while the late eighteenth century is generally characterised by "pre-racial" attitudes, that term would not apply to those early theorists like Long, Estwick and White, whose attitudes must be classed as "racial." In fact, eighteenth century views on race varied from Ramsay's egalitarianism to White's theory that negroes were the lowest distinct species of man.⁴¹ The terms "pre-racial" and "racial" will be used in this study to refer to attitudes more than time periods.

Theories of race played a significant role in the mid-nineteenth century, particularly with regard to mission philosophy and strategy. Curtin has described two distinct attitudes which Europeans held toward Africans, or generally toward "heathen." He terms these "conversionism" and "trusteeship." These were "two ways of assessing the proper goals for non-Western peoples."⁴² Conversionism was strongest from 1830 to 1870 (prior to 1830 the English position had been predominantly

⁴¹Curtin, op. cit., p. 56.

⁴²Ibid., p. 415.

insular).⁴³ Curtin describes its basic tenets:

Most Europeans thought their own way of life represented values of universal application. Barbarians might therefore acquire "civilization." Even more, for some Europeans, to carry civilization to the barbarians was not only possible, it was desirable. It might even become a moral duty. The roots of this belief seem to lie in the theoretical universality of the Christian religion⁴⁴ and the injunction to preach the gospel among the heathen.

Secular thought added impetus with the idea that progress should be shared by all men. But ". . . the new pride in Western civilization . . . led to the easy assumption that the good life was possible only within the framework of Western culture." Economics also played a part. Trade with Africa would be beneficial, but production of exports would only come with culture change.⁴⁵ Underlying the conversionist thought were two beliefs: the African could be "civilised," he was potentially equal to the white men, and it was the white man's responsibility to effect the process.

Although this study precedes the actual conversionist and trusteeship eras, the concepts therein form a useful paradigm against which to compare attitudes. Chronologically, the men in this study are the forerunners of conversionism which blooms in the mid-nineteenth century, but conceptually, some of them are the first conversionists. It could be said that they form the roots of conversionism. It is attitudes very similar to theirs which later become widespread and are held by the later great missionary enterprises. The goals of men such as Rufus Anderson, Henry Venn and John Philip, including self-governing, self-

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 259.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 260.

supporting and self-propagating missions⁴⁶ are not alien in the minds of Wilberforce, Ramsay, Sharp and Clarkson. Their writings demonstrate that they grappled with the question of the innate ability of the negro. They posited (some from first hand observation) the presence of inherent equality, a potential equality which could be (and must be by the injunctions of the gospel) realised by the enlightening influence of Christianity and its attendant culture. However, it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that these premises were formed into a conceptual school, and systematically applied on a larger scale by missionary organisations. This is largely due to the emergence of numerous missionary enterprises, resulting in the necessity of formulating theory either as a guide for strategy, or as an explanation of it.

After 1870 conversionism began to decline as the new attitude of trusteeship developed.

In that great age of imperialism racism became dominant in European thought. Few believed /as they had in conversionism/ that any "lower race" could actually reach the heights of Western achievement. Their salvation would have to be achieved in some other way; but meanwhile they were entitled, in their inferiority, to the paternal protection of a Western power. The idea of trusteeship gradually replaced that of conversion. 47

Trusteeship stood in sharp contrast to conversionism, and was based on the overt racism of the late nineteenth century. The negro was seen as innately and unalterably inferior, but the white man was responsible to protect him. In conversionism, the task of civilising and bringing equality was temporary. In trusteeship, the paternal task or "white man's burden" was endless. As stated above, the scope of this present

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 424.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 415.

study precedes the full flowering of conversionism, and far predates the much later period of trusteeship. However, the values of the conversionists (both the men of the nineteenth century and the early conversionists of the late eighteenth century) are understood more clearly when viewed against the backdrop of later trusteeship.

* * *

CHAPTER I

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE

William Wilberforce, born 1759, must certainly be regarded as one of the champions in the struggle and ultimate victory of freedom over black slavery. Although two previous attempts had been made to bring Parliament to address the issue of slavery,¹ Wilberforce was the first to succeed in 1789 when he introduced the first motion for the abolition of the slave trade.² This was not an impulsive or new concern for him. Nine years earlier he apparently had felt deep concern over slavery. In a conversation with James Ramsay he indicated that "as early as 1780 I had been strongly interested for the West Indian slaves, and in a letter asking my friend Gordon, then going to Antigua, to collect information for me, I expressed

¹In 1776 David Hartley from Hull moved to "establish a proposition that the Slave Trade was contrary to the laws of God and the rights of man." [Thomas Clarkson, The History of the Rise, Progress and accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament, 2 vols. (London, 1808) vol. I. p. 504]. It was seconded by Saville and then immediately thrown out [Reginald Coupland, The British Anti-Slavery Movement, 2nd. ed. (London, 1964) p. 64]. In 1785 a petition was presented to Parliament against the slave trade, by Poulet and Hood. It was ignored. [Coupland, p. 69]

²Actually in 1786 Wilberforce accepted the leadership of the cause in Parliament [Robin Furneaux, William Wilberforce, (London, 1974) p. 70]. In 1788 Pitt, acting for the recuperating Wilberforce activated the Privy Council Trade Committee to inquire into and report on the British Trade with Africa [C. Duncan Rice, The Rise and Fall of Black Slavery (London, 1975) p.218]. He also, on behalf of Wilberforce insured that the House would address the issue of the trade early the next session [Coupland, p. 88; Furneaux, p. 77]. In fact, in May of 1789 Wilberforce had partially recovered, and introduced the motion for abolition himself, in a speech lasting over three hours. Following the speech he presented to the House twelve propositions as his summary of the report of the Privy Council on Slavery and the Slave Trade. [Furneaux, pp. 87-89].

my determination, or at least my hope that some time or other I should redress the wrongs of those wretched and degraded beings."³

However, 1786 was to see the beginning of his focused and concerted effort against slavery, resulting in the successes of 1807, the abolition of the slave trade, and 1833, the emancipation of slaves in the British Empire. The fight against slavery dominated Wilberforce's adult life, the final victory occurring only days before his death with emancipation becoming law shortly thereafter.

I

ATTITUDE TOWARD SLAVERY

There is some question regarding Wilberforce's true position: was he opposed to slavery as an institution, or in fact, only opposed to the abuses of slavery, and thus committed to ameliorating the conditions and making slavery humane and more practicable? The fact that he used his greatest energies in working for the abolition of the slave trade and after this accomplishment in 1807 took a less dominant role in pushing for emancipation has given some validity to at least raising the question. In his writings appear some statements that would indicate his opposition to slavery as an institution. On the other hand, statements appear which seem to reflect his deep hatred for the ill treatment of his fellow human

³Robert Isaac and Samuel Wilberforce, The Life of Wilberforce, 5 vols., (London, 1838) Vol. I, pp. 147-48. Indeed Roger Anstey (The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition 1760-1810 / London, 1975/ p. 250), notes an even earlier interest: "As a boy of fourteen he had . . . written to a York newspaper condemning the slave trade." This appears to come from the R. I. & S. Wilberforce Life, Vol. I, p. 9, and is also noted by Coupland, p. 78. While this early action is interesting, it would be presumptuous to call it the "beginning" of Wilberforce's antislavery activity. It could equally be called an adolescent whim which may have gone no further. In fact, there is no record of any antislavery interest by Wilberforce from the age of fourteen to twenty-one.

beings and plead for their better treatment. In these statements he seems implicitly to accept slavery, if only the conditions can be modified.

In order to discern his underlying feelings about slavery, we shall examine his speech to the House of Commons, 1789, plus his books and pamphlets.

In the early stages Wilberforce fought hard for the ending of the slave trade. Throughout, his point seems to have been that when the supply of slaves was stopped, the slave owners would realise the necessity of better treatment for their slaves, in order to maintain their present number, or even bring about an increase:

It can be proved too, that a variety of individuals, by good usage, have more than kept up their flocks. I will shew by experience already had, how the multiplication of slaves depends upon their good treatment. ⁴

In 1807 he still followed this line of reasoning when he proposed that 1) slave population decreased under harsh conditions, and 2) currently (1807) these decreases were small, even negligible.⁵

He then posited: "If the many existing abuses would account for a great annual decrease . . . if the prevailing abuses could be done away, or even considerably mitigated, we might anticipate in future a great and rapid annual increase."⁶ Yet this increase would never

⁴William Wilberforce, Speech to the House of Commons, 1789, p. 32; p. 28. Hereafter referred to as "1789 Speech."

⁵William Wilberforce, Letter to the Freeholders of Yorkshire, (London, 1807), p. 211. Hereafter referred to as "Yorkshire Letter."

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 216.

occur, he felt, as long as the Trade continued to provide fresh slaves: "the grand evil arising from the continuance of importations from Africa, is, that till they are discontinued, men will never apply their minds in earnest to effect the establishment of the breeding system."⁷ If, on the other hand, the trade were abolished, it would be a:

. . . deathblow to this system. The opposite system, with all its charities, would force itself on the dullest intellects, on the most contracted and unfeeling heart. Ruin would stare a man in the face, if he did not conform to it. The sense of interest so much talked of, would not as heretofore, be a remote, feeble, or even a dubious impulse; but a call so pressing, loud, and clear, that its voice would be irresistible.⁸

These ideas are consonant with his attitude in 1789 when he pleaded with the Commons: ". . . it is not regulations, it is not mere palliatives, that can cure this enormous evil: - Total abolition is the only possible cure for it."⁹ Thus, he summarised his appeal, pushing the members to action, stating: ". . . it is the existence of the Slave Trade that is the spring of all this internal traffic, and . . . the remedy cannot be applied without abolition."¹⁰

From the preceding, it would appear that Wilberforce's primary concern was not with slavery as an institution, but the inhuman abuses of West Indian slavery. Indeed, if he were opposed to slavery, how could he suggest a method of increasing the actual

⁷Ibid., p.243.

⁸Ibid., pp. 243-44. It should be noted that while 1807 was the year of both the abolition of the slave trade and the publication of the Yorkshire Letter, the Letter was actually written prior to the abolition, thus many statements plead for and look forward to that which already would have occurred when the publication appeared.

⁹1789 Speech, p. 51.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 52.

number of slaves in the West Indies? The force of his argument was directed toward the better treatment of slaves, and thus their increase, effected only by necessity which would be produced by the abolition of the trade.

However, the above noted statements of Wilberforce must be viewed in the context of his later writings, and especially those which comment on his earlier activity. A thorough reading of his writings indicates that he was deeply opposed not only to the abuses of slavery but to the institution itself. A possible explanation for what superficially appears to be his acceptance of slavery is his early cognisance that the abolition of the slave trade would not only be the "death blow" to the particular system of quick profit (working to death and then replenishing slaves), but would also be the "death blow" to the system of slavery itself. While he seems to have been speaking against the abuses of slavery, a closer examination of what he said reveals that even in 1789 he felt the abuses were inherent in West Indian slavery, and thus to correct the abuses would really necessitate the ending of the institution.¹¹ Wilberforce did not change his fundamental position regarding slavery between 1789 and 1823, but his early concepts were developed and refined over the intervening years so that by 1823 he could express them more precisely and with greater evidence: "If all the various other causes which operate unfavourably on the condition and treatment of the

¹¹ Wilberforce demonstrated the inherent connection of slavery and abuses by comparing slave labour to free peasantry. In hard times the employer of peasants could lay off his workers, and thus be free of obligation to them. The slave owner had no such option. He must still feed and house his slaves. Of economic necessity, he would severely diminish their rations. "There is therefore a constant tendency to the very minimum with respect to the slaves allowance . . . ," (1789 Speech, p. 23) and the system by its very nature, worked against the slave.

Slaves could be done away, it [slavery] contains within itself the pregnant source of numerous, most important, and, so long as it continues, incurable mischiefs."¹² He also was aware that the public may not see the inherent evil of slavery and be misled into attacking the abuses rather than the system. In a very revealing statement, he warned in 1823:

Some of the abuses which it [slavery] involves have, indeed, been drawn into notice. But when the public attention has been attracted to this subject, it has been unadvisedly turned to particular instances of cruelty rather than to the system in general, and to those essential and incurable vices which will invariably exist wherever the power of man over man is unlimited.¹³

This long standing opposition was based on biblical, economic and humanitarian principles. Biblically, Wilberforce refuted those advocates of slavery who claimed they were within Old Testament bounds because they did not enslave their own nation or brethren. He maintained that:

Inasmuch therefore, as we are repeatedly and expressly told that Christ has done away all distinctions of nations, and made all mankind one great family, all our fellow creatures are now our brethren; and therefore the very principles and spirit of the Jewish law itself would forbid our keeping the Africans, any more¹⁴ than our own fellow subjects, in a state of slavery.

Economically, he spoke of the false economic success of slavery:

The eyes of the public have been dazzled by the sight of some splendid fortunes, which . . . have been rapidly acquired But West Indian speculations, which

¹²Wilberforce, Yorkshire Letter, p. 173.

¹³Wilberforce, An Appeal . . . On Behalf of the Negro Slaves (London, 1823), p. 2. Hereafter referred to as Appeal.

¹⁴Wilberforce, Yorkshire Letter, p. 319. The argument that Christ has made all men "our brethren" was also used by Ramsay, 1788 (see chapter IV, p.84), Sharp, 1776 (see chapter V, pp. 133-5), and Benezet, 1784 (see chapter VI, p.164), [Benezet apparently derived this line of thought from Hutcheson].

have often been called a lottery, are, like a lottery, on the whole a very losing game." ¹⁵

He reasoned that people only continued in such a "losing game", because of the "gambling principle", or, a "disposition to over-rate our probable success, and to assign too little weight to contingencies which may disappoint our expectations."¹⁶

However, the humanitarian argument was his strongest, and is seen in his attack on the degradation caused by slavery. He stated that the:

. . . degradation of the Negro race . . . appears to me to be the grand master vice of the colonial system. If duly considered, and traced into its almost infallible operations, it will establish the prevalence of all the other evils which have been specified; for it is of a nature so subtle and powerful, as to extend its effects into every branch of negro management.¹⁷

Putting the physical abuses and degradation into perspective, he related:

. . . though the evils which have been already enumerated are of no small amount, in estimating the physical sufferings of human beings, especially of the lower rank, yet to a Christian eye, they shrink almost into insignificance when compared with the moral evils that remain behind . . . his extreme degradation in the intellectual and moral scale of being, and in the estimation of his white oppressors.¹⁸

¹⁵ Wilberforce, Yorkshire Letter, p. 266.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 269-70.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 172-3. In a passage that combines his principles of opposition to slavery Wilberforce stated that: ". . . no system of civil policy was ever maintained at a greater price, or was less truly profitable either to individuals or to the community, than that of our West Indian settlements. Indeed, it would have been a strange exception to all those established principles which Divine Providence has ordained for the moral benefit of the world, if national prosperity were generally and permanently to be found to arise from injustice and oppression." (Wilberforce, Appeal, pp. 68-69)

¹⁸ Wilberforce, Appeal, pp. 9-10.

Citing a specific case of gross cruelty and inhumanity, which he seldom did in his writings, he helped the reader look beyond the atrocity to the degradation it portrayed. In both the Yorkshire Letter and the Appeal he described the case of a young slave boy who was lost and frightened after a fire. The owner publicised the loss, requesting protection for the boy, and promising compensation for any damages. Finally it was discovered that the boy had been found by another slave owner, attacked, injured and buried before actually being dead. Wilberforce illustrated the degradation of the slaves by pointing out that the boy was buried alive by fellow blacks, at the command of their white master.¹⁹ He commented: ". . . it is not in the view of its cruelty that I wish you to regard the foregoing narrative, but in that of the decisive evidence which it affords of the utter degradation of the negro race."²⁰

For Wilberforce, the problem of degradation was significant because he saw it as both the lifeblood and the result of slavery. Slavery degraded the black man, both in his own eyes and in those of the whites. Thus a self-fulfilling prophecy occurred and a self-perpetuating cycle evolved: the black man increasingly acted depraved and degraded; the white man increasingly justified his use and treatment of the degraded black man.

. . . it is we ourselves that have degraded them to that wretched brutishness and barbarity which we now plead as the justification of our guilt; how the Slave Trade has enslaved their minds, blackened their character and sunk them so low in the scale of animal beings,

¹⁹Wilberforce, Appeal, p. 56.; Yorkshire Letter, pp. 156-60. In Appeal the same incident is used to deal with the unjust legal code, not degradation.

²⁰Wilberforce, Yorkshire Letter, pp. 159-60.

that some think the very apes are of a higher class,
and fancy the Ourang Outang has given them the go-by.²¹

The result of this never-ending cycle was a people whose ". . . very happiness [arose]. . . from their being insensible to circumstances of humiliation, which all but a brute must understand and feel."²²

Having established degradation of human beings as the inherent evil of slavery, he did not then hesitate to point out the specific elements of slavery which effected that degradation. He mentioned insufficient food,²³ overwork and insufficient clothing,²⁴ complete neglect of religious instruction,²⁵ the experience of seeing fellow human beings sold (degrading to all who observed it, both black and white),²⁶ the insecurity of being forever homeless as the owner could at any time sell a slave to clear a debt,²⁷ working under the whip as incentive, not punishment,²⁸ and, inadequate legal protection, a cause and effect of degradation.²⁹ After describing the cruel public punishing of slaves, such as flogging, he asked: ". . . what must be the effect necessarily produced on the mind from having been habituated to such scenes as these from early infancy?"³⁰

²¹1789 Speech, pp. 47-8.

²²Wilberforce, Yorkshire Letter, p. 132.

²³Ibid., p. 119.

²⁴Ibid., p. 122.

²⁵Ibid., p. 124.

²⁶Ibid., p. 133.

²⁷Ibid., p. 136

²⁸Ibid., pp. 140-141.

²⁹Ibid., p. 147.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 145-46.

If degradation fueled the cycle of slavery by enabling the whites to justify their practice, it also perpetuated the system by making the blacks unfit for freedom and thus making emancipation impracticable if not impossible, this even in the eyes of the abolitionists who most desired emancipation for the negro:

It would be the grossest violation and the merest mockery of justice and humanity, to emancipate them at once [1807], in their present unhappy condition. God forbid . . . that we should not desire to impart to the Negro Slaves the blessings of freedom.

It is indeed a "plant of celestial growth," but the soil and climate must be prepared for its reception, or it will not bring forth its proper fruits. These are fruits, alas! which our poor degraded Negro Slaves [he specifically stated "slaves" not "Africans"] are as yet incapable of enjoying. To grant it to them immediately, would be to insure not only their masters ruin, but their own. 31

Even fifteen years earlier (1792) he had been willing to declare for emancipation:

I am not afraid of being told I design to emancipate the slaves; I will not indeed deny that I wish to impart to them the blessings of freedom 32

But slavery had made them unfit for immediate freedom and the only way to prepare them was by discipline and education, both of which would be necessitated by the abolition of the slave trade.³³

And so to Wilberforce, the evils, the atrocities of slavery were reprehensible. He would work to mitigate them. He would try to harmonise the profit motive of the planter class with the welfare of

³¹Wilberforce, Yorkshire Letter, pp. 258-59. Clarkson also refers to emancipation as "a beautiful plant." See Chapter III (Clarkson) p. 60.

³²Wilberforce, Debate on the Motion for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, in the House of Commons, on Monday the Second of April, 1792, Reported in Detail, (London, 1792) p. 12. [cited in David Brion Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823, (Ithaca, 1975) pp. 408-9.]

³³Wilberforce, Yorkshire Letter, p. 259.

the slave by stopping the supply, and thus he would cause improved conditions to become the chief concern of those who could facilitate them.³⁴ Seeing the atrocities as the inseparable symptoms of the whole system, he attacked the chief symptom, degradation, by striking at the root, slavery itself. This would affect not only the West Indies, but Africa, not only the present, but future generations:

. . . I have often found an idea to prevail, that it is the state of the Slaves in the West Indies, the improvement of which is the great object of the Abolitionists. On the contrary, from first to last, I desire it may be borne in mind, that Africa is the primary subject of our regard. It is the effects of the Slave Trade on Africa, against which chiefly we raise our voices, as constituting a sum of guilt and misery³⁵

Thus he was committed to totally abolishing slavery and in 1823 he was able to clarify that he and his fellow abolitionists had always held ultimate emancipation as their goal: ". . . nor am I conscious of any occasion, on which we disclaimed the intention of emancipation, without accompanying the disclaimer with the clear explanation that it was immediate, not ultimate emancipation, which we disclaimed."³⁶ They had not attacked slavery per se, because they had felt the odds were too great against them, whereas they were more likely to succeed in abolishing the trade³⁷ and thereby would eventually kill the

³⁴"When the manager shall know, that a fresh importation is not to be had from Africa, and that he cannot retrieve the deaths he occasions by any new purchases, humanity must be introduced; an improvement in the system of treating them will thus infallibly be effected, an assiduous care of their health and of their morals, marriage institutions, and many other things, as yet little thought of, will take place; because they will be absolutely necessary." (Wilberforce, 1789 Speech, p. 28)

³⁵Wilberforce, Yorkshire Letter, pp. 10-11.

³⁶Wilberforce, Appeal, p. 36.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 34-35.

institution. But the reality of the succeeding years would cause Wilberforce to reflect that ". . . this foundation of our hopes may have rested on sandy ground."³⁸

We were too sanguine in our hopes as to the effects of the abolition in our colonies; we judged too favourably of human nature; we thought too well of the colonial assemblies; we did not allow weight enough to the effects of rooted prejudice and inveterate habits -- to absenteeism. . . ; to the distressed finances of the planters; and above all, to the effects of the extreme degradation of the Negro slaves, and to the long and entire neglect of Christianity among them, with all its attendant blessings.³⁹

Only these later comments can put into perspective his earlier comments which seem to accept congenial slavery. From the beginning of his campaign Wilberforce was opposed not only to the abuses of slavery, but to slavery as an institution.

II

ATTITUDE TOWARD THE IDEA OF NEGRO INFERIORITY

Early in his fight against slavery, Wilberforce recognised the intrinsic relationship between prejudice toward negroes and slavery. To destroy the myth of negro inferiority would be to break one of the strongholds of the institution. In 1807 he wrote:

. . . the only ground on which the Slave Trade was defended, even in Jamaica, was that of the Negroes being an inferior species. This opinion, as I formerly remarked, was the original foundation of the Slave Trade, and it is the only ground on which it can be rested with the smallest pretense to reason, justice, or humanity. ⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid., p. 37.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

⁴⁰ Wilberforce, Yorkshire Letter, pp. 286-87.

Even in 1793 he requested Zachary Macaulay, in Sierra Leone, to send him evidence for his Parliamentary fight that would be ". . . such 'damning proof' to the contrary [of negro inferiority] that no honest man could honestly resist the force of it."⁴¹ Specifically, he requested "everything . . . which refutes the assertions of our opponents that the Africans are an inferior species; that they are incapable of civilisation, either from intellectual or moral defects."⁴²

His need for evidence stemmed from the fact that

The advocates for the Slave Trade originally took very high ground; contending, that the Negroes were an inferior race of beings. It is obvious, that, if this were once acknowledged, they might be supposed, no less than their fellow brutes, to have been comprised within the original grant of all inferior creatures to the use and service of man. A position so shameless, and so expressly contradicted by the Holy Scriptures, could not long be maintained in plain terms. ⁴³

He went on to say that the supporters of the trade knew once they gained public acceptance of the idea of negro inferiority, ". . . all, except perhaps a few stubborn advocates for justice in the abstract, would be content to leave them [negroes and slaves] to their fate."⁴⁴

Thus, as Wilberforce ". . . gathered evidence, debated in Parliament, addressed his constituency and wrote pamphlets in favor of abolition, he asserted the full humanity of the Negro as the basis

⁴¹Wilberforce, Letter to Macaulay, August 23, 1793, cited in Robert Isaac and Samuel Wilberforce, Life of William Wilberforce, vol. II, pp. 409-10.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Wilberforce, Yorkshire Letter, p.54.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 55-56.

of his action."⁴⁵ In response to Edward Long's view that negroes were co-equal to orang-outangs,⁴⁶ he lamented: "When we find such sentiments as these to have been unblushingly avowed by an author of the highest estimation among the West India colonists, we are prepared for what we find to have been, and, I grieve to say, still continues to be the practical effects of these opinions."⁴⁷

By 1823 Wilberforce was hopeful that the day was "gone by forever, in which the alleged inferiority of intellect and incurable barbarity of the African race [would] extenuate their oppression . . ."⁴⁸ He asserted that the ideas which proposed and supported this prejudice had been adequately refuted.⁴⁹ And yet he was aware that the results and carryover of such prejudice could not be contained: "The fact is, that though the old prejudice, that the Negroes are creatures of an inferior nature, is no longer maintained in terms, there is yet too much reason to fear that a latent impression arising from it still continues practically to operate in the colonies . . ."⁵⁰

⁴⁵W. Baker, "William Wilberforce on the Idea of Negro Inferiority," Journal of the History of Ideas, XXXI (1970) no.3, p. 433.

⁴⁶Edward Long, History of Jamaica, 3 Vols. (London, 1774) Vol. II, pp. 358-371.

⁴⁷Wilberforce, Appeal, p. 12. This passage shows Wilberforce in stark contrast to Edward Long; an interesting example of Bolt's thesis that the abolitionists "asserted in general terms the equality of races." (Christine Bolt, Victorian Attitudes Toward Race, [London, 1971], p. 227).

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 63.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 63-64.

⁵⁰Wilberforce, Appeal, p. 43.

Even if the myth of negro inferiority were to be successfully exposed and refuted now, the problem was made much more complex by the process already set in motion in the West Indies. It was one thing to correct an erroneous view of man, but quite another to reverse the momentum of a long entrenched institution based on that myth, which now, in fact supplied its own evidence in support of the myth. Wilberforce saw that slavery had so degraded the slaves that evidences of moral, intellectual and physical degradation were innumerable. When a European was exposed to such degraded persons, he would spontaneously feel contempt which was reinforced when he saw the slave's physical difference, lack of civilisation and slavery induced vices:

The proofs of the extreme degradation of the slaves, in the latter sense [moral and intellectual] are innumerable; and, indeed, it must be confessed, that in the minds of Europeans in general, more especially in vulgar minds, whether vulgar from want of education, or morally vulgar, the personal peculiarities of the Negro race could scarcely fail, by diminishing sympathy, to produce impressions, not merely of contempt, but even of disgust and aversion. But how strongly are these impressions sure to be confirmed and augmented, when to all the effects of bodily distinctions are superadded all those arising from the want of civilization and knowledge, and still more, all the hateful vices that slavery never fails to engender or to aggravate. Such, in truth, must naturally be the effect of these powerful causes, that even the most ingeniously constructed system which humanity and policy combined could have devised, would in vain have endeavoured to counteract them: how much more powerfully then must they operate, especially in low and uneducated minds, when the whole system abounds with institutions and practices which tend to confirm and strengthen their efficiency, and to give to a contemptuous aversion for the Negro race, the sanction of manners and of law. 51

Wilberforce here identified the positive and total correlation of slavery and negro inferiority. The effects of the degradation of slavery were so powerful, they could not be counteracted by mere "humanity." The relationship

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 10-11.

between the system and prejudice was cyclical so each fed the other, constantly maintaining its velocity. It had become so ingrained in the society that the prejudice had the "sanction of manners and of law."

Being careful to establish that this state of degradation was a result of slavery, and not inherent within the black people, Wilberforce pointed out however "low in point of morals as the Africans may have been in their own country, their descendents, who have never seen the continent of Africa, but who are sprung from those who for several successive generations have been resident in the Christian colonies of Great Britain, are still lower."⁵² He maintained that the Africans in Africa were better educated and far more moral than the Africans in the West Indies.⁵³ To evaluate them "in their state of bondage, was not less unphilosophical than unjust."⁵⁴ And to clinch his argument of the unilateral effects of slavery that all men would be equally degraded by it, he delivered his crowning blow:

It was remarked by M. Dupuis, the British consul at Mogadore, that even the generality of European Christians, after a long captivity and severe treatment among the Arabs, appeared at first exceedingly stupid and insensible. "If" he adds, "they have been any considerable time in slavery, they appear lost to reason and feeling; their spirits broken, and their faculties sunk in a species of stupor, which I am unable adequately to describe. They appear degraded even below the Negro slave. The succession of hardships without any protecting law to which they can appeal for any alleviation or redress, seems to destroy every spring of exertion or hope in their minds. They appear indifferent to every thing around them; abject, servile, and brutish." ⁵⁵

⁵² Wilberforce, Appeal, pp. 30-31.

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 31-32.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 65.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 65; also printed in the Quarterly Review, Jan. 7, 1816, article entitled: "Tombuctoo."

Wilberforce reasoned: "If the native intelligence and buoyant independence of Britons cannot survive in the dank and baleful climate of personal slavery, could it be reasonably expected that the poor African, unsupported by any consciousness of personal dignity or civil rights, should not yield to the malignant influences to which they had so long been subjected, and be depressed even below the level of the human species?"⁵⁶

In order that his readers comprehend how such degradation would occur, Wilberforce specified the kind of treatment the slaves received, listing: indecent public punishment, especially of females; the drivers, themselves slaves, forcing young female slaves to submit to them sexually; the Christian institution of marriage being withheld from them because "the slaves are considered as too degraded to be proper subjects for the marriage institution," thus the "prevalence of promiscuous intercourse . . . is nearly universal . . . ;" single young overseers, who ". . . ought to be the protectors of the purity of the young females, too often become their corruptors;" and the widespread practice of nonmarital cohabitation between whites and blacks.⁵⁷ The only conceivable outcome of this kind of treatment was that those subjected to it would certainly become degraded and act the part of inferiors:

Not man alone, but beings in general, throughout the whole range of animated nature, instinctively seek the indulgencies and enjoyments suited to their condition and capacities. Depressed therefore nearly to a level with the brute creation, the negro Slaves instinctively adapt themselves to their level, and are immersed in merely animal pursuits. Hence it is, that those very Negroes, who in Africa are represented as so eminent

⁵⁶ Wilberforce, Appeal, pp. 65-66.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 16-22.

for truth, so disinterested in kindness, so faithful in the conjugal and domestic relations, so hospitable, so fond of their children, of their parents, of their country, gradually lose all these amiable dispositions with the enjoyments which naturally arise out of them, and become depraved and debased by all that is selfish and mercenary, and deceitful, timid and indolent, and tyrannical. ⁵⁸

In the circle of this web, the world would see the negroes in the above description, and unavoidably judge them as inferior:

"Such is Mr. Long's portrait of the negro character; such was the state of contempt into which the whole race had fallen, in the estimation of those who had known them chiefly in that condition of wretchedness and degradation into which a long continued course of slavery had depressed them."⁵⁹ The result was even harsher, less humane treatment, with the slave owners feeling justified in such:

". . . it is habit that generates cruelty: - This man looking down upon his Slaves as a set of beings of another nature from himself, can have no sympathy for them, and it is sympathy, and nothing else . . . which . . . is the true spring of humanity."⁶⁰ In fact, the colonists defended the supposed well-being of the slaves on the sole evidence that the slaves had sufficient food.⁶¹

⁵⁸Wilberforce, Yorkshire Letter, pp. 246-247. .

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 61. To counter this opinion Wilberforce cited "Parke" (no friend of abolition) who "represents the Africans of the interior as naturally superior, both in their intellectual and moral endowments, to almost any other uncivilized nation" (Wilberforce, Yorkshire Letter, p. 66). He followed this with similar accounts from Golberry. Both Parke and Golberry were travellers who recorded their observations about Africa and its inhabitants.

⁶⁰Wilberforce, 1789 Speech, pp. 21-22. In his Appeal, Wilberforce noted again the inference of inferiority from degradation, and the resulting attitude toward slave conditions and treatment: ". . . on what other principle than that of inferiority of the species, can it be explained, that, in estimating what is due to the Negroes, all consideration of their moral nature has been altogether left out?" (Wilberforce, Appeal, p. 44)

⁶¹Wilberforce, Appeal, p. 44.

Thus the cycle was complete. It began with the assumed inferiority of the negroes, treatment followed in a manner appropriate to inferior beings, the victims descended to respond on the same level as their treatment, and observation concluded that they were indeed inferior, even moreso than initially supposed. The fact that negro inferiority was being exposed as a myth to the western world was irrelevant to the West Indian society. There the cycle was so entrenched that the myth had become reality. Something more than education about the negro was needed.

But what about Wilberforce's personal view of the negro? Were his arguments for their human dignity and equality merely rhetoric for his Parliamentary stance, or were they reflective of his personal and genuine feelings? Relating the character of the negroes to their having been created by the creator of the whites he suggested kinship and decried a difference in nature. "I must once more raise my voice against that gross misconception of the character of the Negroes (an impeachment of the wisdom and goodness of their Creator no less than of our own), which represents them as a race of such natural baseness and brutality as to be incapable of religious impressions and improvements."⁶² He did however, recognise differences: particularly that Africa lacked civilisation (in the western sense). But this he attributed to her lack of contact with "civilized nations." He suggested that had the circumstances been reversed, and ". . . had we been left in their situation, we should probably have been not more civilized than themselves."⁶³ Further,

⁶² Wilberforce, Yorkshire Letter, p. 247.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 80.

he posited that had Africa been the "cradle of the world," Britons might have become slaves of Africans.⁶⁴ And yet, the nature of the contact that finally did come between Africa and the civilised nations had a depraving rather than a civilising effect. He maintained that contrary to other nations, the interior parts of Africa, having least contact with the outside world, were the most civilised, while the coastal regions, having more outside contact were the most barbarous.⁶⁵

Wilberforce strongly implied that after the negroes had been introduced to and adopted certain forms of Christian society (western civilisation), they would develop and move toward their potential equality. He stated that after appropriate improvements, "they will surely be acknowledged to be fit for the lower civil functions."⁶⁶ He seems to have suggested that the potential equality was present, but the actual equality would be a long time in being developed and applied to relationships. It was Britain's responsibility to help in the development: if they were not "yet fit for the enjoyment of British freedom, elevate then at least from the level of the brute creation into that of rational nature . . ." so at least they would be regarded as "a grateful peasantry, the strength

⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 80-81.

⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 86-7. It should be explained that Wilberforce believed trade normally carried civilisation with it. However, Africa was not a recipient of that civilisation because its exposure to the outside world was only through the slave trade, which he did not consider a "legitimate" trade. Thus Africa was the recipient of European savagery, not civilisation; her coastal areas became less civilised than her insulated inland. On the other hand, Wilberforce felt that Africa would benefit by positive contact with the outside world through legitimate trade. See also Curtin, p. 253. Cf. below, chapter III (Clarkson) p.63.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 249.

of the communities in which they live"67 This developmental issue was not to be equated with prejudicial thinking that confused superficial characteristics with innate abilities. To be undeveloped was significantly different from being inherently incapable. Wilberforce recognised this difference, and realised that to associate intellectual ability with physical appearance was merely prejudice and was unfounded. In 1789 he demonstrated his abhorrence of prejudice by quoting from Neckar's treatise:

In short we pride ourselves on the superiority of man, and it is with reason we discover the superiority in the wonderful and mysterious unfolding of the intellectual faculties; and yet a trifling difference in the hair of the head, or in the colour of the epidermis, is sufficient to change our respect into contempt, and to engage us to place Beings, like ourselves, in the rank of those animals, devoid of reason, whom we subject to the yoke, that we may make use of their strength and of their instinct. 68

In support of the view that negroes were capable of development, he cited both Sierra Leone and Trinidad. In Sierra Leone, the African character had been "vindicated,"69 "they have resumed the stature and port of men, and have acquired, in an eminent degree, the virtues of the citizen and the subject."70 In Trinidad American Negroes, free by desertion, had become a good labour force.71

Further, Wilberforce's view of the full humanity of the negro is hinted at in his exposing and decrying a double standard of the

⁶⁷ Wilberforce, Appeal, p. 74.

⁶⁸ 1789 Speech, p. 46. As indicated in the Introduction, overt racism which equated superficial characteristics with innate ability was a development of the late nineteenth century; however, a crude sort of racism did exist in the eighteenth century, and it was this to which Wilberforce was here referring.

⁶⁹ Wilberforce, Appeal, p. 64.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 66.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 68.

West Indies. There, black/white marriages were proscribed, while black/white cohabitation was condoned. Wilberforce condemned the latter, but not the former; possibly giving an insight into his own view of inherent equality.⁷²

But finally for Wilberforce equality was a spiritual matter and any class distinctions would have no eternal significance. In 1823 he pleaded for others to come to this realisation:

Is it nothing to be taught that all human distinctions will soon be at an end; that all the labours and sorrows of poverty and hardship will soon exist no more; and to know, on the express authority of Scripture, that the lower classes, instead of being an inferior order in the creation, are even preferable objects of the love of the Almighty? ⁷³

For the slave he held out hope because of the nature of God:

"... a common Creator, who is no respecter of persons, and in whose presence he may weekly stand on the same spiritual level with his superiors in rank, to be reminded of their common origin, common responsibility, and common day of final and irreversible account."⁷⁴ This statement indicates again his belief that social distinctions, or ranks, (while an unquestioned fact of eighteenth century life) were unrecognised by God "who is no respecter of persons." Spiritual equality was actual, based on "common origin," demanding "common responsibility" and accountability; but intellectual and moral equality would be the results of conditioning. Thus even though he lived in a highly class conscious society, Wilberforce realised the superficiality and temporary nature of such distinctions.

⁷²Ibid., p. 24.

⁷³Ibid., p. 47.

⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 47-48.

According to Wilberforce, the black man was underdeveloped. Further, he was incapable of attaining his potential until he was Christianised. On the other hand, when he was converted and when he adopted the values and education of Christianity (Western culture) he would become capable of equal development to the white man. He had the innate ability. Christianity would open the path to his becoming fully, instead of only spiritually equal. The task of Christianising the negro was definitely the white man's responsibility as "power always implies responsibility."⁷⁵

The views that conversion opens the door to equality, and that it is the white man's responsibility to convert the negroes show Wilberforce to be one of the early "conversionists," predating the major thrust of Conversionism in the mid-nineteenth century. Even though Wilberforce cannot be credited with the development of conversionist thought (that was the work of others such as Sharp, Ramsay and Benezet) its tenets are clearly present in his attitudes. The black man's equality depended on Christian enlightenment, but his future did not depend on the continuing help of the white man, standing forever as his overlord and guide. As a Conversionist, Wilberforce would have opposed "trusteeship" (which blossomed in the late nineteenth century) feeling it to be an infringement on the dignity and full humanity of the black man whom he so faithfully had championed.

Among his contributions to the negro stand not only his massive assault on slavery in the British Empire, but also his showing the rationalization of the system to be mere prejudice. As he stripped

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 75.

the idea of negro inferiority from slavery, the institution would eventually prove to be defenseless.⁷⁶ His long and sustained fight was reinforced by his belief in the inherent worth and equality of all men, as God's creation.

III

MOTIVATION

What is it that motivates a man to give himself relentlessly to a task for forty-seven years, a task that threatens his reputation, his health and is most often thankless? Reflecting on this question, Wilberforce's sons felt his commitment to abolition and involvement in the cause "were the immediate consequences of his altered [religious] character."⁷⁷ David Brion Davis indicates that ". . . for Wilberforce the abolition movement was only one prong of a vast religious crusade to reform an unregenerate social order by first infusing government with the spirit of Christian morality."⁷⁸

Following his conversion, Wilberforce contemplated leaving Parliament for what he considered a more useful life. It was Pitt who saw the relationship of his new faith to the abolition cause and persuaded Wilberforce to remain and undertake the leadership of antislavery in Parliament.⁷⁹

His evangelical faith seemed to arouse his social conscience, especially in the issues of slavery and public morality. His

⁷⁶Baker, op. cit., p. 440

⁷⁷Robert Isaac and Samuel Wilberforce, Life of Wilberforce, vol. I, p. 146.

⁷⁸David Brion Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823 p. 427.

⁷⁹Coupland, The British Anti-Slavery Movement, p. 73.

heightened awareness of injustice, war, misery and a host of other evils can be seen in his speech of 1789:

It is a trade in its principle most inevitably calculated to spread disunion among the African princes, to sow the seeds of every mischief, to inspire enmity, to destroy humanity; and it is found in practice, by the most abundant testimony, to have had the effect in Africa of carrying misery, devastation, and ruin wherever its baneful influence has extended. ⁸⁰

According to his calculations, fifty per cent of the negroes who were taken from Africa perished within three years. How could such a trade be reconciled with the commandment which stated: "Thou shalt not kill?" Near the end of his speech he would quote that commandment and comment: "There is a principle above everything that is political."⁸¹ Wilberforce would also have been influenced by the pacifism of the Quakers and their view that slaves were taken in acts of war. In 1806 he "affirmed that there could be no doubt that the principles of the Bible, especially of the New Testament, ran counter to the slave trade, or 'even slavery'"⁸² To Talleyrand he described the slave trade as the "violation of the plainest principles of the Religion of Jesus."⁸³

This Christian conscience, coupled with a political interest and ability would motivate his antislavery activity throughout his life, so that at the age of 64 he could reflect upon the cause

⁸⁰Wilberforce, 1789 Speech, pp. 11-12.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 54.

⁸²Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, p. 549, quoting Wilberforce to unknown correspondent, June 17, 1806 (cited from Autograph MSS, Historical Society of Pennsylvania).

⁸³Wilberforce, A Letter to His Excellency the Prince of Talleyrand, (London, 1814) p. 54. Hereafter referred to as "Talleyrand."

as his sacred charge, or "positive duty," - in his words:

"... an irresistible conviction that it is his [referring to himself] positive duty to endeavour to rouse his countrymen" ⁸⁴

Thus "Christian conscience" seems to have been his motivator in a general sense. More specifically, what Wilberforce saw as National reasons for abolition seem to have worked themselves into his consciousness or at least into his subconsciousness. When he refers to national guilt, judgment and responsibility, one cannot help feeling he had absorbed these as motives in a personal sense, almost a vicarious sense, so fully did he identify with his people.

In his Appeal he spoke of slavery and the trade as "deeply criminal" ⁸⁵ calling slavery a "national crime of the deepest moral malignity." ⁸⁶ When he called the nation to "absolve ourselves from such a heavy load of guilt as this oppression amounts to," ⁸⁷ the term "ourselves" reflects his feeling of personal involvement in the guilt. He identified with the collective evil of his people.

This can be seen further in 1814 when he called England to work off her guilt - a sort of penance - by persuading other nations to end the trade. ⁸⁸ It is feasible that his own extensive efforts to persuade the English indicate again that he subconsciously transferred the nation's guilt to himself. In his exhorting England to accept the guilt and therefore the responsibility, one senses his personal

⁸⁴ Wilberforce, Appeal, pp. 75-76.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 2.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 1.

⁸⁸ Wilberforce, Talleyrand, p. 56.

acceptance of guilt and the need to work it off. For England, as for him, there was no passing the blame on to others:

We are all guilty - we ought all to plead guilty, and not to exculpate ourselves, by throwing the blame on others; and I therefore deprecate every kind of reflection, against the various descriptions of people who are more immediately involved in this wretched business. 89

Closely related to national guilt, the fear of national judgment seems to have been a motivator. Wilberforce was concerned for the best interest of his countrymen, more than for his own welfare. He feared for their wellbeing and warned:

That the almighty Creator of the universe governs the world which he has made; that the sufferings of nations are to be regarded as the punishment of national crimes; and their decline and fall, as the execution of His sentence90

He was anxious to awaken the nation and prevent catastrophe.

Another factor of motivation appears to have been a sense of religious responsibility. It appears to have originated from a feeling of personal responsibility and then developed into national responsibility. Wilberforce felt an innate opposition to seeing his fellows, God's creatures, degraded. The awareness of human degradation made him regard physical abuses as insignificant by comparison.⁹¹ The unavoidable result of degradation was immorality,

⁸⁹ Wilberforce, 1789 Speech, p. 5.

⁹⁰ Wilberforce, Yorkshire Letter, p. 4. In fact Wilberforce inferred that perhaps judgment had already begun: ". . . a disease new in it's kind, [yellow fever] and almost without example destructive in its ravages, has been for some time raging in those very colonies which are the chief supporters of the traffic in human beings; a disease concerning which we scarcely know anything, but that it does not affect the Negro race, and that we first heard of it after the horrors of the Slave Trade had been completely developed in the House of Commons, but developed in vain." [Wilberforce, Yorkshire Letter, pp. 348-9]

⁹¹ Wilberforce, Appeal, pp. 9-10.

which he felt, as a Christian, must not be tolerated by a Christian nation. Slavery could not be separated from the immorality it necessarily produced: ". . . the ruin of the moral man . . . has been one of the sad consequences of his bondage."⁹² In 1823 he proclaimed that the moral condition of the slaves alone would have been a sufficient cause for him to declare publicly his conviction for emancipation.⁹³ England was the cause of the slaves' immorality (he supported this by citing how much lower in morals were the West Indian negroes than the negroes in Africa)⁹⁴ and therefore must be responsible for introducing Christian civilisation to them. This view strongly indicates a moral imperative to correct the wrongs which a nation has wrought.

Further, Wilberforce's antislavery activity was not an isolated concern for his fellows. While it was obviously the cause which dominated his activities it did so only as the primary expression of a deep concern for the wellbeing of all humanity. His sense of being "called" to help all his fellows can be seen in his own words: "God Almighty has set before me two great objects, the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners."⁹⁵ His establishing the Proclamation Society, 1787 (after 1802 called the Society for the Suppression of Vice) reflects this social/spiritual concern, especially as he saw it as support for "laws against: Sabbath-breaking, duelling, lotteries, drunkenness, unlicensed entertainment, blasphemy,

⁹²Ibid., p. 24.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Ibid., pp. 30-32.

⁹⁵R. I. & S. Wilberforce, op. cit. Vol. I, p. 149, referring to Wilberforce's Journal, Sunday, October 28, 1787.

obscurity and other unwholesome forms of behaviour in public"96

All of these he viewed as collective social evils which destroyed individuals. England was a "Christian nation" and must live up to this description. Individual conversion was important, but legislated social reform was also necessary.

His personal concern for others can be seen in his very generous philanthropy, one single example of which was his annuity to Charles Wesley's widow.⁹⁷ It is also seen in his deep interest in Christian missions.

Wilberforce was a man of great sensitivity. From earliest years he was overly scrupulous in matters of conscience. His Christian faith simply provided guidelines and channels for that active conscience. His faith permeated his lifestyle so that he acted to others, especially the oppressed as he thought Christ would act (even needy strangers appealing at his home would not be turned away). How consistent then, that this man of deep feeling, generous disposition and committed faith would give his life to relieving what he saw as the greatest oppression of his fellow man, slavery.

⁹⁶Furneaux, op. cit., pp. 54-55.

⁹⁷While Mrs. Charles Wesley (Sally Gwynne) did receive a pension, set up by John Wesley, it is likely that the frugal means he arranged (consistent with his own lifestyle) appeared to Wilberforce to be inadequate, especially for someone of Mrs. Wesley's former social position and wealth. It is also possible that her needs were not being met following John's death in 1791.

CHAPTER II

JOHN NEWTON

John Newton was born in 1725. In his early years he was taught and guided by his devoutly Christian mother, who died just before his seventh birthday. His father was a sea captain and began taking him on voyages from the time he was ten years old. Newton's exposure to slavery was extensive, from the time he was twenty until he was twenty-nine years of age. In 1745 he was discharged from the Royal Navy to serve for six months on a ship slaving off the coast of Africa. When she sailed for the West Indies, Newton stayed in Africa to become the helper and apprentice of Clow, a mulatto slave trader. Rather than serving as an apprentice Newton found himself to be Clow's slave for the next year and a half. In later years he described this time as the most difficult of his life, mistreated when ill, underclothed and underfed, even degraded and humiliated by the black slaves. The period was finally ended when Clow released him to another trader and Newton became a resident trader at Kittam. With this he grew more satisfied and became hopeful that same day he could return to England with his fortune and claim his childhood sweetheart, Mary Catlett. This dream was interrupted by the arrival of the Greyhound. The captain brought word that Newton's father desired his return and free passage would be provided aboard the Greyhound, with Newton sharing the captain's quarters. The voyage lasted another eighteen months as the Greyhound continued in Africa trading for articles, and then made her way to England via South America to pick up the trade winds.

The last leg of the voyage was most significant for Newton. The stormy North Atlantic proved almost the undoing of the Greyhound

and her crew. During one of these storms, Newton began to find peace in the God he had thoroughly rejected and blasphemed. The change was apparent; the process was begun which would see Newton a committed Christian, whether captain of a slave ship, or minister of the Church of England.

When the Greyhound was safely back in England, Newton was offered the command of a slave ship. Feeling the lack of experience he agreed to take one voyage as First Mate aboard the slaver, Brownlow. Following this voyage he married Mary Catlett and then took command of the Duke of Argyle, his first voyage as captain taking thirteen and a half months. In 1753 and 1754 he commanded two more slaving expeditions in the African. Within two days of his next voyage, aboard a new ship, the Bee, Newton suddenly became ill. The day before departure, he resigned command. Without his own plan or design, he ended his days as a slave ship captain. The next nine years were spent as a Tide Surveyor, examining ships for smuggled goods.

In 1764 Newton took Holy Orders and became curate of the Olney parish, where he served for sixteen years. From Olney he moved to London where he served St. Mary, Woolnoth until his death in 1807. While in London Newton contributed to the antislavery cause, writing THOUGHTS UPON THE AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE in 1788, and giving evidence to the House of Commons in 1789 and 1790.¹

John Newton is something of an anomaly, at least from a twentieth century perspective. While an intense Christian, he was deeply involved in the Slave Trade. This paradox cannot simply be resolved by saying

¹Biographical information is based on John Newton, Letters, Sermons, and A Review of Ecclesiastical History, three volumes (Edinburgh, 1780), Vol. I, "Authentic Narrative," passim., and Bernard Martin, John Newton, A Biography, (London, 1950), passim.

Newton was insensitive as Furneaux indicates.² He was a deeply sensitive man, as seen in his letters to his wife, and in his hymns. While commanding his slave ships, Newton frequently wrote to his wife. Years later he published these letters. One such letter, written from his first voyage as captain, demonstrates this sensitivity:

"You know the grove where we have sometimes walked together; but where I more frequently passed many hours by myself. I call that grove my chapel, and my study. There I have offered many prayers for your welfare. There I have formed plans for my future conduct, and considered in what manner I might best deserve and return your love. There is not a tree in the whole walk, if it could speak and would speak truth, might bear testimony to my regard for you. For I believe you know that it is my frequent custom to vent my thoughts aloud, when I am sure that no one is within hearing. I have had many a tender soliloquy in that grove concerning you, and, in the height of my enthusiasm, have often repeated your dear name, merely to hear it returned by the echo. These and many other harmless things, which the insensible and the mercenary would term fooleries, I have done" 3

These are certainly not the words of an unfeeling brute of a man. Likewise, the words of the hymns he composed display a capacity for feeling and tenderness. The following hymn is reputed to have been written while on a slaving voyage, with slaves stowed beneath the decks.⁴

²Furneaux, William Wilberforce, p. 38.

³John Newton, The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Late Rector of the United Parishes of St. Mary Woolnoth and St. Mary Woolchurch Haw, London, 2nd ed., 6 vols. (London, 1816) Vol. V, ("Letters to a Wife", 13 May, 1751), p. 352.

⁴Furneaux, William Wilberforce, p. 38.

How Sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear?
 It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
 And drives away his fear.

It makes the wounded spirit whole, And calms the troubled breast;
 'Tis Manna to the hungry soul,
 And to the weary rest.

Dear name the rock on which I build, My shield and hiding place;
 My never-failing treas'ry fill'd
 With boundless stores of grace.

By thee my pray'rs acceptance gain, Altho' with sin defil'd;
 Satan accuses me in vain,
 And I am own'd a child.

Jesus! my Shepherd, Husband, Friend, My Prophet, Priest, and King:
 My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
 Accept the praise I bring.

Weak is the effort of my heart, And cold my warmest thought;
 But when I see thee as thou art,
 I'll praise thee as I ought.

Till then I would thy love proclaim, With ev'ry fleeting breath;
 And may the music of thy name Refresh my soul in death. 5

Nor can the paradox be resolved by discounting his conversion experience or his Christian commitment. For Newton the Christian, God was in all of life. Every opportunity and circumstance reflected His providence. The fact that he had such a good livelihood, as captain of a slave ship, was "the appointment Providence had marked out for me" ⁶ He attributed his safety through numerous storms at sea to the hand of Providence, assuring his wife: "that storms and calms are equally safe to those who trust in the God of the sea and the dry land." ⁷ When the slaves on board premeditated insurrections,

⁵ John Newton, Olney Hymns in Three Books, 2nd ed. (London, 1781) pp.72-3.

⁶ John Newton, Letters, Sermons, and a Review of Ecclesiastical History, Vol. I "Authentic Narrative" p.95.

⁷ Newton, The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. V, ("Letters to a Wife", Aug. 18, 1754.) p.486.

by Providence, they were always discovered in time: "By the favour of Divine Providence made a timely discovery today that the slaves were forming a plot for an insurrection."⁸ The entries in his diary, Journals and letters repeatedly refer to Providence, in the business of slaving. His three slave voyage journals, begin with the words ". . . . voyage intended (by God's permission) . . . to Africa".⁹ The launching of his new vessel, the African, was an occasion of dedication rather than the customary festivity.¹⁰ Newton was a Christian; the slave trade was his business, and God was with him!

There is no easy resolution to the paradox . . . even for Newton. Years after he was out of the slave trade, and it must be remembered that he left for reasons of health, not conscience, he expressed the same confusion about how he could have remained in the trade as a Christian. When he published his Letters to a Wife, he added a footnote referring to slavery:

The reader may perhaps wonder, as I now do myself, /underlining mine/ that, knowing the state of the vile traffic to be as I have here described, and abounding with enormities which I have not mentioned, I did not, at the time, start with horror at my own employment, as an agent in promoting it. Custom, example, and interest, had blinded my eyes. I did it ignorantly: for, I am sure, had I thought of the slave trade then, as I have thought of it since, no considerations would have induced me to continue in it. Though my religious views were not very clear, my conscience was very tender, and I durst not have displeased God by acting against the light of my mind. Indeed, a slave ship, while upon the coast, is exposed to such

⁸ John Newton - The Journal of a Slave Trader 1750-1754, eds. Bernard Martin and Mark Spurrell, (London, 1962), (11 Dec. 1752) p. 71.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 3, 66, 87.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 64.

innumerable and continual dangers, that I was often then, and still am, astonished that any one, much more so many, should leave the coast in safety. I was then favoured with an uncommon degree of dependence upon the providence of God, which supported me; but this confidence must have failed in a moment, and I would have been overwhelmed with distress and terror, if I had known, or even suspected that I was acting wrong. 11

His moving from the slave trade to another occupation was also attributed to providence:

When I returned to Liverpool /from the third voyage, 1754_7 and was upon the point of sailing in the Bee, it pleased God to stop me by illness. By the advice of the physicians, I resigned the command of the ship; and was thus unexpectedly freed from the disagreeable and (as I now see it) the abominable employment and traffic in which I had been engaged. 12

How John Newton moved from viewing the slave trade as his providential appointment to an 'abominable employment' remains something of a mystery. There is little to indicate what brought about his change, and how gradual it was.¹³ But over the thirty-four years from when he left the trade to when he wrote his tract against the slave trade there is a marked contrast. He who had felt the trade provided his livelihood providentially became an outspoken critic of the trade.

Once out of the trade the process of changing his views occurred, perhaps assisted by the influence of other Evangelicals who spoke adamantly against the trade and against slavery, and assisted by having time to reflect in a detached setting on his own experiences with the slave trade.

¹¹Newton, The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. V ("Letters to a Wife") pp. 406-7 n.

¹²Ibid., p. 487. This is a note following the last letter, Aug. 18, 1754. (It is interesting to note that the captain, most of the officers and many of the crew of the Bee died on that voyage, Letters, Sermons, and a Review of Ecclesiastical History, Vol. I "Authentic Narrative" p. 96.)

¹³Newton's Unpublished Diaries (22 Dec. 1751 to 5 July 1754) might yield some insights to his change, but apparently they are not available. Personal correspondence from Bernard Martin (26 Sept. 1980) indicates that Newton's Diaries were last in the private possession of a "Boston Professor", name unknown.

I

ATTITUDE TOWARD SLAVERY

In some regards it is as though Newton must be viewed as two different men: the Christian slave trader with no scruples against the slave trade, and later the abolitionist, using his past experience to forward the abolition cause (abolition of the trade). His attitude toward slavery and negroes must necessarily be reflected from both periods.

While in the slave trade Newton fully accepted the institution of slavery. The slave trade then became the logical and necessary means of supplying the institution. In looking through his slave trading journals it becomes apparent that he viewed the trade simply as a business, with an eye to improving profits. He looked for good buys on slaves, and rejected those that were not likely to pay off:

25 January, 1751; "Yellow Will brought me a woman slave, but being long breasted and ill made, refused her"

10 February, 1751; "Will Gray sent me off a slave with a young child, but I refused her, being very long breasted." 14

24 September, 1752; "I have refused 7 slaves yesterday and today, being either lame, old or blind." 15

There is no hint of emotion or empathy in his daily Journal entries. While he tried to treat slaves with humanity, the motive seems to have been to benefit the business. This applies even when insurrection was attempted. After a plot was exposed and defused, Newton arranged for the organisers to be transferred to another vessel. This would not only rid him of troublemakers, but give them better conditions, and thus bring

¹⁴Newton, The Journal of a Slave Trader 1750-1754, p. 35.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 67.

a better price for them in the West Indies: ". . . . being a very large, roomy vessel, not intended for slaves, and well manned. They promise to keep them [the rebellious slaves] all out of irons the whole passage, which I expect will improve them almost to the difference of the freight, which I agreed at six pounds sterling per head."¹⁶

It is interesting to note that while the first voyage journal is filled with details of slaving, until the West Indies is reached, there are only two references to slaves in all the letters to his wife (from the first voyage). By the third voyage, Newton did not mention slaves at all to Mary, and made only two references to the "business."

For Newton, the slave trade was a business, and nothing more. Even when he thought he was at the point of death he did not consider his involvement in the traffic a matter of conscience, or related to his moral condition:

Though it [the fever] was not of the most dangerous species, I thought it right to consider it as a warning to prepare for eternity: and I praise God, the principles upon which I aim to rest my hope when in health, did not fail me in sickness. ¹⁷

For the general public, slavery and the slave trade were almost fully accepted; they were a fixture of the eighteenth century. Although Newton would do his best to alleviate the abuses where he was personally involved, he saw no inherent evil in the institution. Certainly in his early Christian life he was a man of his century, not challenging the system or even questioning it. He is an excellent example of many eighteenth century Christians who saw no contradiction between Christianity and slavery.

¹⁶Ibid., (15 December, 1752), p. 72.

¹⁷Newton, The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. V, ("Letters to a Wife", 16 May, 1754), p. 463.

Even when his views on the slave trade did change, the contrast is not as drastic as one would expect. It is significant that in 1794, well after he took his stand against the trade, he did not join with many other Evangelicals in calling the slave trade a dominant "national sin." In his sermon, "The Imminent Danger and the Only Sure Resource of this Nation," he mentioned many other ills as national sins, but justified not placing the slave trade in this category on the grounds that he believed the majority of Englishmen already desired its suppression:

I should be inexcusable, considering the share I have formerly had in that unhappy business, if, upon this occasion, I should omit to mention the African slave trade. I do not rank this amongst our national sins, because I hope, and believe, a very great majority of the nation earnestly long for its suppression.¹⁸

Perhaps he still did not realise the gravity and extent of such a gross social evil. At best he was influenced by misguided optimism which would only be rectified by the long years until 1807.

Even so, Newton's change of heart from 1754 to 1788 is curious if not astounding. By 1788 he called the trade the "stain of our national character",¹⁹ and maintained that "sound policy" suggests "the total suppression of a trade, which, like a poisonous root, diffuses its malignity into every branch."²⁰ He concluded his pamphlet by appealing to the "common sense of mankind" against "a commerce so iniquitous, so cruel, so oppressive, so destructive, as the African Slave Trade!"²¹ Obviously something had awakened or at least focused his own "common sense."

¹⁸Ibid., p. 262. This sermon was preached at St. Mary, Woolnoth, 28 Feb. 1794 and published that same year.

¹⁹Ibid., Vol. VI, ("Thoughts Upon The African Slave Trade", hereafter referred to as "Thoughts"), p. 519.

²⁰Ibid., p. 535. It is interesting to observe that thirty-five years later Wilberforce referred to slavery (not the trade) as "a crime of the deepest moral malignity", perhaps drawing on Newton's terminology, (Wilberforce, Appeal, p. 2.) Cf. Chapter I, Wilberforce, p. 26.

²¹Ibid., p. 546.

It appears that a number of influences brought Newton to the point of opposing the slave trade, a position far from where he stood in 1754. These influences were much greater than simply his own deep thinking and reflecting on his past, as evidenced by the fact that later in life when he wrote of his earlier vileness and sinfulness, he was referring to vices related to blasphemy and not to his involvement with slavery.²² It is interesting to note that in his writings there is no evidence to suggest his opposition to slavery as an institution. He wrote only in opposition to the slave trade. It is true that other abolitionists spoke against the trade, but often, particularly in the case of Wilberforce, they were using this as a lever by which eventually the institution itself would be broken. For Newton, the dominant evil was the slave trade. It seems that he was brought into the antislavery camp, and that he made his contributions to the cause, without having committed himself against slavery as an institution. His speaking against the trade, but not against the institution, might well indicate that he had caught the influence and momentum of his fellow abolitionists,²³ without catching the end purpose many of them had so clearly in mind. Thus he could speak from first hand experience, and add a needed and significant dimension to the cause by relating actual details, without ever coming to grips with the evil on the other side of the Atlantic.

Further evidence of this point is suggested by the fact that when Newton spoke against the trade, he was speaking more of the distress the trade caused the English, than the evil done to Africans. He specifically spoke against the trade in point of financial profit (the lottery effect),

²²See below, p. 50.

²³Furneaux, William Wilberforce, p. 39.

and its abuse and degradation of English seamen. Only secondarily did he speak of the degradation of the Africans. By contrast, Wilberforce indicated that it was "the effects of the Slave Trade on Africa, against which chiefly we raise our voices" ²⁴ Obviously Newton was seeing mainly England's short term loss from the trade; Wilberforce perceived the long term damage that the trade effected: the total problem of slavery.

But even in speaking merely against the trade, the contrast between Wilberforce and Newton could well indicate their differing levels of commitment to that aspect of the cause. Whereas Wilberforce had no actual first hand experience with slavery or the slave trade, Newton had spent nine years of his life directly involved in it. Newton had personally witnessed the gruesome process of buying, transporting and selling slaves. He had watched as they were separated from loved ones; he had buried them at sea and had lived through their attempted insurrections. Who would be more qualified to relate incident after incident, description after description, than the old slave ship captain? His words would carry a powerful emotional impact. And yet, Newton did not speak with the warmth of Wilberforce. ²⁵ While Wilberforce called upon so many approaches and techniques to persuade his audience, Newton used comparatively few, and even so was cautious about his use of emotional appeal. It is remarkable that he would restrict himself to the relatively few incidents that he described, unless these were the scenes which had faded into indistinctness

²⁴ Wilberforce, Yorkshire Letter, p. 11.

²⁵ Newton's own explanation for his approach to the potentially emotionladen incidents is recorded in his "Thoughts": "As it is not easy to write altogether with coolness upon this business, and especially not easy to me, who have formerly been so deeply engaged in it; I have been jealous, lest the warmth of imagination might have insensibly seduced me, to aggravate and overcharge some of the horrid features, which I have attempted to delineate, of the African trade. But, upon a strict review, I am satisfied." (Newton, The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. VI / "Thoughts" / p. 545.)

over the years, as in his disclaimer.²⁶ Part of the reason for the difference in use of emotional appeal could also lie in the fact that Wilberforce wrote hundreds of pages against the slave trade, whereas Newton wrote only one small pamphlet. But perhaps this too is indicative of a significant contrast between the two men.

The fact that Newton spoke only of the trade and not against slavery is possibly attributable to the fact that the evils of the trade were so dominant in his mind that he thought little of the evils of the institution. If the evils of the trade were removed, the institution in a different quarter of the world would probably have been accepted as innocuous. From this appraisal of his views, it appears that even in later life Newton remained a man of his age, not challenging its social institutions.²⁷

²⁶In both his tract of 1788 and his evidence to the House of Commons (1790) Newton made the disclaimer that some thirty-three years had passed since his involvement in the trade, and some "scenes and transactions grow indistinct." (Newton, The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. VI, p. 521). See also Newton's Evidence to a Committee of the House of Commons, 11th and 12th May, 1790; House of Commons Sessions Papers, Vol. XXX, 1790, Nos. 699, p. 138 (hereafter referred to as "Newton: Evidence to . . . the House of Commons.")

²⁷It should be pointed out that Bernard Martin disagrees with the position taken here, feeling that Newton did step beyond the values of his age regarding slavery (personal correspondence with the author). However, the argument from silence is persuasive, and Newton's total silence on the question of slavery would seem to indicate at best his lack of deep concern for that larger question. His greatest contribution was in lending an eye witness account, in support of the case other abolitionists were already making. He did not initiate the attack on the slave trade, but was recruited for it, and his condemnations were limited to the slave trade, not mentioning slavery, which for many abolitionists was the overriding issue. The author agrees with Mr. Martin however, that because of Newton's experience his impact against the slave trade was unique and significant.

It is interesting to observe the similarity of Newton's attitude regarding slavery to that held by George Whitefield, an important friend of Newton. Whitefield was strongly opposed to the inhuman treatment of slaves, but saw nothing wrong with the institution of slavery. In fact, he supported it with Old Testament scripture. See below, Chapter VII (Wesley), pp. 213-15.

(footnote continued next page)

II

ATTITUDE TOWARD THE IDEA OF NEGRO INFERIORITY

Newton's view of negroes seems to have been somewhat mixed.

At times he praised them for their positive qualities, and at other times he alluded negatively to characteristics which he generalised to their race. Overall Newton seems to have regarded the Africans as equal to the white man in potential but not in present reality, as the potential had not yet been developed. This perspective will help to qualify the specific statements he made about negroes. Thus when he expressed a good trait, he was usually qualifying it, at least in his own mind as a trait which was good as far as the negroes were concerned. By 1788 he was aware of the role prejudice played in evaluating others, and was possibly admitting his own prejudice when he mentioned that the blacks ". . . have, probably, the same natural prejudice against a white man, as we have against a black" ²⁸

In looking at Newton over the period of years from his involvement in the trade until he gave evidence to the House of Commons in 1789-90,

Footnote 27 continued from page 41

From contemporary literature, Rice illustrates how completely accepted this attitude was in the eighteenth century. Referring to DeFoe's Robinson Crusoe, he recalls Crusoe's shipwreck, island experience and subsequent return to Britain. There Crusoe learned that his (slave run) plantation had been kept going by his trustees. It had increased and thus he could retire as a wealthy man. "The general message is clear: slavery is normative, an acceptable weapon in the process of capitalist accumulation. On the other hand, its relationships may be slightly modified by human bonds" (C. Duncan Rice, "Literary Sources and the Revolution in British Attitudes to Slavery" in Antislavery, Religion and Reform, eds. Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher / Kent, 1980 /, p. 324.

²⁸ Newton, The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. VI, ("Thoughts") p. 528.

it appears that his views were generally common to the pre-racial attitudes of the eighteenth century, but he also shows the emergence of some stereotypic thinking. In 1753 he could write his wife about the negroes explaining how backward he considered them to be:

The three greatest blessings of which human nature is capable, are undoubtedly, religion, liberty and love. In each of these, how highly God has distinguished me! But here are whole nations around me, whose languages are entirely different from each other, yet I believe they all agree in this, that they have no words among them expressive of these engaging ideas: from whence I infer, that the ideas themselves have no place in their minds. 29

Certainly he saw them as lacking the positive development which Christianity and civilisation bring: "Instead of the present blessings, and bright future prospects of Christianity, they are deceived and harassed by necromancy, magic, and all the train of superstitions that fear, combined with ignorance, can produce in the human mind."³⁰ To try to explain to these natives the beauties and qualities of love would "be labour lost; like describing the rainbow to a man born blind."³¹ He thought their values were totally utilitarian, an opinion which was substantiated by such African statements as: "Will not one woman cut wood and fetch water as well as another?"³²

And yet years later when asked by the House of Commons: "What conclusions did you form respecting the capacity of the Negroes, compared with that of other men in the same period of society?" he responded: "I always judged that, with equal advantages, they would be

²⁹Ibid., Vol. V, ("Letters to a Wife" 26 January, 1753), p. 406.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., p. 407.

³²Ibid.

equal to ourselves in point of capacity; I have met with many instances of real and decided natural capacity amongst them."³³ This statement shows Newton to be thinking in terms which comprise one tenet (the equal potential of all men) of later conversionism.

During his time on the coast of Africa Newton expressed both his pleasure and displeasure with the Africans. After entertaining a native prince on board he could declare the evening "very much to my satisfaction [his] being master of a great deal of solid sense and a politeness of behaviour I seldom meet with in any of our own complexion hereabouts."³⁴ He also noted in his journal when he had been treated with unusual honesty by the natives.³⁵ Giving evidence to the House he described the natives as honourable and honest: "The principal people, who received presents from the ship, would take no money for the provisions they brought"³⁶

On other occasions he had found them to be less than honourable and candid. At least the coastal slave dealers (many of whom were mulattos) he had found "to be all villains to a man except [Mr. Tucker]"³⁷ and had learned that he could "give little credit to reports of any kind in this country."³⁸

So Newton saw negroes as a group, distinct from other groups, and sometimes he ascribed positive traits, and other times negative traits to the group as a whole. However, he consistently considered the members

³³"Newton: Evidence to . . . the House of Commons," 1790, p. 138. This is later quoted by Wilberforce in the appendix (p. 369) of his Letter to the Freeholders of Yorkshire.

³⁴Newton, The Journal of a Slave Trader 1750-54, (24 November, 1751), p. 19.

³⁵Ibid., (27 April, 1751), p. 42.

³⁶"Newton: Evidence to . . . the House of Commons," p. 139.

³⁷Newton, The Journal of a Slave Trader 1750-54, (17 December, 1750), p. 24.

³⁸Ibid., (26 December, 1750), p. 24.

of that group to be fully human, and even when he was in the slave trade, he always referred to the slaves as "men" and "women."³⁹

When a contemporary writer expressed that the negroes deserve little compassion, because they have no natural affection, Newton declared the writer to be misinformed.⁴⁰ His attitude toward the humanity of the negroes can also be seen in his view of human sexuality, compared with the practices of the times. He described the all too common slave ship scene:

When the women and girls are taken on board a ship, naked, trembling, terrified, perhaps almost exhausted with cold, fatigue, and hunger, they are often exposed to the wanton rudeness of white savages. The poor creatures cannot understand the language they hear, but the looks and manner of the speakers are sufficiently intelligible. In imagination, the prey is divided, upon the spot, and only reserved till opportunity offers. Where resistance or refusal, would be utterly in vain, even the solicitation of consent is seldom thought of. 41

This was certainly not the case on Newton's ships as indicated by a journal entry on his second voyage:

William Cooney seduced a woman slave down into the room and lay with her brutelike in view of the whole quarter deck, for which I put him in irons. I hope this has been the first affair of the kind on board and I am determined to keep them quiet if possible. If anything happens to the woman I shall impute it to him, for she was big with child. 42

For those who rationalised and justified such treatment on grounds of negro inferiority Newton spoke directly:

³⁹Ibid., passim.

⁴⁰Newton, The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. VI ("Thoughts") p. 539.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 532.

⁴²Newton, The Journal of a Slave Trader 1750-54, (31 January, 1753), p. 75.

Perhaps some hard-hearted pleader may suggest, that such treatment would indeed be cruel, in Europe: but the African women are negroes, savages, who have no idea of the nicer sensations which obtain among civilized people. I dare contradict them in the strongest terms. I have lived long, and conversed much, amongst these supposed savages. And with regard to the women, in Sherbro, where I was most acquainted, I have seen many instances of modesty, and even delicacy, which would not disgrace an English woman. Yet, such is the treatment which I have known permitted, if not encouraged, in many of our ships - they have been abandoned, without restraint, to the lawless will of the first comer. 43

Newton did see the negroes as fellow human beings, if not up to the developmental level of the whites, at least deserving of basic respect and humane treatment.

He took special note of negro intelligence, particularly where language was concerned:

. . . they are so quick at distinguishing our little local differences of language and customs in a ship, that before they have been in a ship five minutes, and often before they come on board, they know, with certainty, whether she be from Bristol, Liverpool, or London. 44

He also discounted the general claim of the natives' indolence, noting that they were often hired to work on the slave ships on the coast, and they produced sufficient rice to supply themselves and

⁴³ Newton, The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. VI, ("Thoughts"), p. 533. In this context it is significant to see the contrast of Newton's attitude to that of Edward Long: Long opposed white sexual contact with slaves on the same basis he opposed sexual contact with animals; it was degrading to the white. (See Edward Long, History of Jamaica, Vol. II, pp. 364, 328, 330.) "I do not think that an Orang Outang husband would be any dishonour to an Hottentot female." (Long, p. 364) Newton, as seen above, opposed sexual contact with slaves because he saw them as human beings, capable of human virtue and emotion and not to be degraded by being "used." This strongly supports a "pre-racial" view in which other groups were seen to be different, but equally human.

⁴⁴ Newton, The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. VI, ("Thoughts"), pp. 534-35.

the slave ships.⁴⁵

Regarding African civilisation Newton saw some very positive qualities, especially in law, morality and justice.⁴⁶ When questioned by the House of Commons about this sort of justice in regard to the natives' plundering English ships, he replied that it was ". . . usually . . . by way of retaliation" for wrongs done by the English.⁴⁷ Further he maintained that slavery among the natives was much milder than among the whites, the slaves of blacks being protected against mistreatment.⁴⁸ He admitted that "natural affection may not be so strong as in other countries" but this was due to the custom of polygamy,⁴⁹ and in Newton's thinking this would be altered as the negroes were Christianised.

When dealing with the apparent depravity of the Africans, Newton took much the same approach as Wilberforce attributing this to European influence: "The most humane and moral people I ever met with in Africa were on the River Gaboon, and Cape Lopas; and they were the people who had the least intercourse with Europe at that time." (Wilberforce in fact quoted Newton on this point.)⁵⁰ When the House

⁴⁵ "Newton: Evidence To . . . The House of Commons" pp. 139-40.

⁴⁶ Newton, The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. VI, ("Thoughts") pp. 536-37.

⁴⁷ "Newton: Evidence To . . . The House of Commons" p. 139.

⁴⁸ Newton, The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. VI. ("Thoughts") pp. 536-37.

⁴⁹ "Newton: Evidence To . . . The House of Commons" p. 140.

⁵⁰ "Newton: Evidence To . . . The House of Commons" p. 138. This was also quoted by Wilberforce in 1807 - Yorkshire Letter, Appendix p. 369. This argument was used by Wilberforce, 1807, Yorkshire Letter - pp. 61 & 66 - (see Chapter I, p. 18, footnote 59 - when Wilberforce drew on Parke and Golberry - Wilberforce also used this reasoning in 1823, Appeal, pp. 30-31. See Chapter I (Wilberforce) p. 16.

of Commons questioned him more directly about European influence, he asserted:

The intercourse of the Europeans has assimilated them more to our manners; but I am afraid has rather had a bad than a good influence upon their morals; I mean they learn our customs, they wear our apparel, they get our furniture; but they are generally worse in their conduct in proportion to their acquaintance with us. 51

This influence was felt and despised by the black man. In recalling his business transactions with the natives Newton related: "When I have charged a black with unfairness and dishonesty, he has answered, if able to clear himself, with an air of disdain, 'What! do you think I am a white man!'"⁵²

Thus, Newton saw the negroes in both a favourable and an unfavourable light. In their present condition, especially after European influence, he saw them as inferior. However, with the qualifications due a primitive people, especially in a developmental state, they were "equal" to the white man. Newton's attitudes grew out of his own direct observation. He simply recorded what he had experienced and drew general conclusions. He did not theorize or draw extensive inferences, therefore in his writings can be found nothing comparable to Wilberforce's description of the cycle of slavery and negro inferiority, or his exposure of the myth of negro inferiority as a justification for slavery.

Newton's view that the black man was capable of development, and his view that development would be enhanced by exposure to Christianity indicate that he held a major tenet of Conversionist thinking. Further,

⁵¹Ibid., p. 140. Cf. Chapter I (Wilberforce), p. 20.

⁵²Newton, The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. VI, ("Thoughts") p. 535. Also mentioned in "Newton: Evidence To . . . The House of Commons," p. 143.

although his writings do not show the same concern for Christianising the Africans that Wilberforce's writings do, his personal involvement does demonstrate that concern. He was made a director of the Sierra Leone project and considered it "the first instance we can find in the annals of mankind, in which the civilization and salvation of the inhabitants were the primary objects in settling a colony."⁵³ Likewise he spoke in favour of the founding of the London Missionary Society and was on the committee when the Church Missionary Society was formed.⁵⁴ His view of the negroes' potential, and his concern about Christianising them place Newton along with Wilberforce among the early Conversionists.

III

MOTIVATION

The motivation for Newton's involvement in the antislavery cause remains somewhat obscure. Beyond a few direct references in his works, there is little to indicate why he spoke against the slave trade in 1788, when thirty-four years earlier he had been a part of it. His works contain no indication of when or how his change of heart regarding the trade occurred. If Wilberforce's sons could describe his antislavery labours as a "sacred charge" which began with his conversion, there is no such clear-cut ascription for Newton who continued in the slaving business for four voyages after his conversion. He did not speak against it until many years after. When he did speak out, it seems he was acting out of what he considered to be personal responsibility, and a need to confess publicly his past wrongs. In

⁵³ Martin, John Newton, A Biography; p. 324.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 324-5.

stating his reasons for writing Thoughts Upon The African Slave Trade he expressed his "conviction that silence, at such a time and on such an occasion, would, in me, be criminal."⁵⁵ But more than responding to a need to help the oppressed Africans, or to enlighten the blinded Englishmen the need he responded to may be more closely associated with his own catharsis: "If my testimony should not be necessary or serviceable, yet, perhaps, I am bound in conscience to take shame to myself by a public confession, which, however sincere comes too late to prevent or repair the misery and mischief to which I have, formerly, been accessory."⁵⁶ There was now emotional discomfort in memory as he recalled ". . . I was once an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders."⁵⁷ And yet in later life, when he thought of sin, and of himself as sinful, he did not seem to make a strong association between sin and his involvement in the trade. In 1806 when it was suggested that he might retire from preaching he replied: "I cannot stop. What! shall the old African blasphemer stop while he can speak?"⁵⁸ How interesting that he called himself an 'old African blasphemer', not an old African Slave Trader. Apparently for him there was not a strong relationship between blasphemy and dealing in slaves, and there was more guilt in the former, enough to make him feel responsible to continue preaching against sin.

⁵⁵ Newton, The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. VI, p. 519.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 519-20.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 520. Even when publishing his "Letters to a Wife" in 1793 he reflected on his involvement in the trade: "had I thought of the slave trade then, as I have thought of it since, no considerations would have induced me to continue in it." (Newton, The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. V, ["Letters to a Wife"] p. 406 n.).

⁵⁸ Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. XL, p. 398; Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton - Ed. Bickersteth - (London, 1835), p. 272.

It is also conceivable that Newton was motivated by a sense of national responsibility. He had expressed his views that any profits from the trade were essentially blood money,⁵⁹ and therefore not only a "stain on our national character"⁶⁰ but a cause for temporal judgment.⁶¹ He had once been viewed by a captain as a Jonah, incurring God's judgment; could it be that he now partially saw himself as a prophet in the role of awakening a nation to avoid God's judgment?⁶² At least he spoke to the issue as having national consequences and his having "a regard for the honour and welfare of my country."⁶³

A less obvious but underlying cause of Newton's involvement stemmed from his general concern for his fellow human beings. He was very humanitarian in his response to people. His curacy in Olney was characterised by deep concern for and involvement with the very poor workers. He remained committed to them, choosing to continue among them when he had opportunity to move to a more lucrative and higher class parish.⁶⁴ His correspondence reflects this same concern for individuals. He wrote often to servants and people of lower stations

⁵⁹ Newton, The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. VI, p. 523.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 519.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 523.

⁶² Newton, Letters, Sermon, and a Review of Ecclesiastical History, Vol. I ("Authentic Narrative") pp. 52, 63-64.

⁶³ Newton, The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. VI, p. 546.

⁶⁴ The industry of Olney was farming and lace making. The women worked long days in their homes, receiving incredibly low wages for their lace. Newton was a welcomed visitor in their homes and although he was an inspiration and encouragement to these poor, he was not the one to effect a change in their long hours or low wages.



(more than a hundred of these letters are still extant), and noted their illnesses and problems and even those of their relatives.⁶⁵ Even in his slaving days he opposed the inhuman custom of "dunking" new sailors crossing the 'Line'.⁶⁶ Likewise his considerate treatment of mutinous sailors shows his humanitarian spirit.⁶⁷

But these traits are difficult to reconcile with his apparently unfeeling involvement in the trade, unless he was so much a part of his age that he could not see the application of humanity to slavery, the application lying dormant until aroused by others at a later date. This is a plausible explanation for a man of sensitivity and humanity in some areas being so insensitive in others; it was the dichotomy of his age, which was only resolved later in his life. Then could his inner tendencies touch the area of slavery. But even then, consistent with all his individual compassion, he assisted with a view to helping individuals, but not changing social structures. So it would appear

⁶⁵ Martin, John Newton, A Biography, p. 336.

⁶⁶ It was the practice of crews to "initiate" sailors who were crossing the 'line' for the first time by "dunking" them, unless they could pay a substitutionary fine. Newton commented to his wife: "And in many vessels they single out some poor helpless boy or landsman, to be half drowned for the diversion of his shipmates. But, as I do not choose to permit any arbitrary or oppressive laws to be valid in my peaceful kingdom, I always pay for those who cannot pay for themselves." (Newton, The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. V. p. 392.)

⁶⁷ On one occasion three sailors were plotting against Newton. Two of the offenders were put in irons, but the third, being ill, was not. Soon after, the latter died. In his diary Newton recorded: "I can sincerely say that I have . . . endeavoured to do my duty by them, without oppression, ill language or any kind of abuse as remembering that I also have a Master in Heaven and that there is no respecter of Persons with him. And I resolve to entertain no personal hatred or ill will . . . I will treat them with humanity while under my power and not render their confinement unnecessarily grievous, but yet I do not think myself at liberty to dismiss the affair in silence lest encouragement should be thereby given to such attempts . . ." The offenders were sent to a man of war, via another vessel (Newton, The Journal of a Slave Trader 1750-1754, pp. 69, 71-2).

that Newton was motivated to work against the slave trade predominantly out of a sense of concern for his fellows, this concern being furthered by his need to make amends for his past, his desire for England's welfare, and perhaps initiated by the momentum of the antislavery movement.

In Newton's own words: "I have . . . written . . . simply from the motive I have already assigned; a conviction, that the share I have formerly had in the trade, binds me, in conscience, to throw what light I am able No one can have less interest in it than I have at present, further than as I am interested by the feelings of humanity, and a regard for the honour and welfare of my country."⁶⁸

⁶⁸Newton, The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. VI, p. 546.

CHAPTER III

THOMAS CLARKSON

The work of Thomas Clarkson must be regarded as one of the most important factors in the abolition of the British slave trade, although he has not received the public acclaim of some other abolitionists. Born in 1760, he was educated at Cambridge, took deacon's orders and planned to enter the ministry. His plans were altered when at the age of 25 he entered the Cambridge Senior Bachelor Essay Contest. The assigned topic was "Is it right to enslave men against their will?" In researching and writing on slavery, Clarkson became so deeply moved and horrified that shortly thereafter he committed his life to fight slavery, thus giving up his plans for the ministry. It is significant that Clarkson's earliest involvement with slavery and the slave trade was through research and writing. His contribution to the movement was as the dominant researcher and fact finder of the abolitionists. In fact, from the time he entered the cause until his temporary retirement (due to illness) in 1794 he travelled more than thirty-five thousand miles, corresponded personally with four hundred persons and wrote the equivalent of one book per year for the cause.¹

¹ Clarkson, The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the Slave Trade by the British Parliament, Vol. II, pp. 469-70. (Hereafter referred to as History)

Of major significance was Clarkson's securing eye witness evidence. Although a couple of eye witness testimonies were available (Ramsay and Newton) it was Clarkson who scoured the country collecting, recording and organizing accounts for Parliament. On two occasions he persuaded surgeons embarking on slaving voyages to keep journals for future evidence against the trade (Clarkson, History, I, pp. 336-7 [Gardiner] and pp. 342-4 [Arnold]). His accounts later found their way into his pamphlets and books which were accessible to Members of Parliament and the public. Griggs indicates that Clarkson was the "first to assemble reliable information about the horrors of the slave trade and the fearful mortality" (Earl Leslie Griggs, Thomas Clarkson the Friend of Slaves [London, 1936] p. 74).

I

ATTITUDE TOWARD SLAVERY

The writings of Clarkson clearly demonstrate that he was totally opposed to slavery on religious, philosophical and humanitarian grounds. He spoke out strongly and relentlessly in condemning the slave trade, the abuses of the system and slavery by striking at its root, the slave trade. When that ended, he felt the cruel conditions of West Indian slavery would of necessity be ameliorated. But these improved conditions were not seen by any means to be an end in themselves; they were simply part of the process of preparing the negroes for full emancipation - which was Clarkson's goal from the time he entered the cause.²

This opposition to the entire institution of slavery is consistent in Clarkson throughout the years. It is not a conviction or position which developed with time. It is reflected in his earliest through his latest writings but can particularly be seen in his Essay of 1786, History of 1808, Life of William Penn of 1813 and his Thoughts on Necessity of 1823.³

²In writing his History, Clarkson expressed the process of the abolition committee in deciding whether to attack slavery or the slave trade: "The question then was, which of the two they were to take as their object. Now in considering this question it appeared that it did not matter where they began, or which of them they took, as far as the end to be produced was the thing desired. For, first, if the Slave-trade should be really abolished, the bad usage of the slaves in the colonies, that is, the hard part of their slavery, if not slavery itself, would fall." (Clarkson, History, Vol. I, p. 284).

³An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Particularly the African; translated from a Latin Dissertation, which was Honoured with the First Prize in the University of Cambridge, for the year 1785, (London, 1786.) p. 80. (Hereafter referred to as Essay) ". . . it is evident that this commerce [in this context he is referring to the whole process of buying and selling men, i.e., slavery, not just the specific slave-trade of England], is not only beyond the possibility of defence, but is justly to be accounted wicked, and justly impious, since it is contrary to the principles of law and government, the dictates of reason, the common maxims of equity, the laws of nature, the admonitions of conscience, and, in short, the whole doctrine of natural religion."

It appears that Clarkson had thought through the issues and implications of slavery more deeply than either Wilberforce or Newton. He attacked it from several vantage points. Philosophically, the system was not viable and throughout his Essay are repeated statements of its inherent wrongness:

"... liberty is a natural . . . right, because all men were originally free."

"... it is impossible . . . that liberty can be bought or sold! It is neither saleable, nor purchasable."

"Human liberty can neither be bought nor sold."

"... no just man can be justly consigned to slavery, without his own consent." 4

Because slavery was wrong on the basis of one's natural right to freedom, Clarkson opposed compensating the planters for their loss of property. It would be far more just to compensate the 800,000 Africans

(footnote continued)

A similar summary is expressed in the concluding paragraph of the Essay (pp. 166-67).

In 1808 he described the committee's opposition to slavery, and their decision to attack it through the elimination of the trade. History, I, pp. 283-84.

In 1813 he expressed high regard for William Penn whom Clarkson felt sealed the abolition of the slave trade and the emancipation of Negroes in his province. Memoirs of the Private and Public Life of William Penn, Two Vols. (London, 1812,) Vol. II, p. 474.

In 1823 Clarkson pointed out that "The second and last step to be taken by the Abolitionists should be, to collect all possible light on the subject of emancipation, with a view of carrying that measure into effect in its due time. They ought never to forget, that emancipation was included in the original idea of the abolition of the slave trade. Slavery was then as much an evil in their eyes as the trade itself; and so long as the former continues in its present state, the extinction of it ought to be equally an object of their care." Thoughts on the Necessity of Improving the Conditions of the Slaves in the British Colonies, with a View to their Ultimate Emancipation, (London, 1823,) p. 7. (Hereafter referred to as "Condition of Slaves").

⁴Clarkson, Essay, pp. 54, 56, 159, 55.

who had lost their property, i.e., their liberty.⁵ On this same basis slave rebellions could not be considered unjust since the slaves were only attempting to regain what was rightfully theirs by natural law.⁶

Clarkson's attitude on this issue serves as a significant indicator of his total commitment to anti-slavery. To be sympathetic to slave rebellion was a mark of radicalism. More than being sympathetic, Clarkson reasoned that rebellions were a logical impossibility, or a contradiction in terms, at least in the British Empire: "If . . . they are your subjects, you violate the laws of government, by making them unhappy. But if they are not your subjects, then, even though they should resist your proceedings, they are not rebellious."⁷

On religious principles slavery was also viewed to be wrong. Clarkson called it a ". . . flagrant violation of the laws of nature and of God."⁸ The religious principle which was destroyed by slavery was one's accountability to God. Man's being accountable to God was a strong presupposition for Clarkson, but being the property of another man transferred that accountability from God to the owner, and thus made it impossible to adhere to God's law.⁹

Further, slavery was wrong because it rested on a false assumption, the inferiority of the slave. For Clarkson, "property should be inferior to its possessor. But how does the slave differ from his

⁵Clarkson, Condition of Slaves, p. iii.

⁶Clarkson, Essay, p. 159.

⁷Ibid., p. 115.

⁸Ibid., p. 57.

⁹Ibid., pp. 56, 160 and 162-3. Man's accountability to God and its concomitant rights were also posited by Wesley in 1772. See below, Chapter VII (Wesley) pp. 204-5.

master, but by chance? For though the mark, with which the latter is pleased to brand him, shows, at the first sight, the difference of their fortune, what mark can be found in his nature, that can warrant a distinction?"¹⁰ While advocates of slavery defended it on the basis of the negroes' inferiority, and therefore the right of others to have dominion over them, Clarkson maintained: "No such signs of inferiority are to be found in the one, and the right to dominion in the other is incidental."¹¹ While the negroes were not inherently inferior to the whites, slavery did produce a sort of inferiority through degradation. Tracing the concept to Homer, Clarkson began to develop (in his essay of 1785) the cycle of slavery, used so effectively by Wilberforce. He explained:

This treatment, which thus proceeded in the ages of barbarism, from the low estimation, in which slaves were unfortunately held from the circumstances of the commerce, did not fail of producing, in the same instant, its own effect. It depressed their minds; it numbed their faculties; and, by preventing those sparks of genius from blazing forth, which had otherwise been conspicuous; it gave them the appearance of being endued with inferior capacities to the rest of mankind. 12

But according to Clarkson slavery did not result in the degradation of the slaves only, those responsible for maintaining the system were also affected: ". . . such is the system of slavery, and the degradation attached to this system, that their [West Indian legislators] humanity

¹⁰Ibid., p. 55.

¹¹Ibid., p. 146. (Clarkson's full argument against slavery based on inferiority is found on pp. 134-147 of his Essay.)

¹²Ibid., p. 12. See above, Chapter I (Wilberforce) pp. 8, 9, 15, 16 and 19.

seems to be lost or gone, when it is to be applied to the Blacks."¹³

Thus for Clarkson there was no reasonable defence for slavery. As well as being based on false premises, it was antithetical to religion and philosophy. He was resolved to oppose it and bring about its end and he chose to do this by first attacking the slave trade. He was convinced that when the supply of fresh slaves was stopped, the interest of the planters would demand improved treatment and conditions for the existing slaves. They would even be allowed to give legal evidence in court. With improved conditions, the slaves would become prepared for emancipation; and concurrently the planters would realise the increased efficiency and profitability of a free labour force. Thus, emancipation would be a logical and smooth outgrowth of the abolition of the trade.¹⁴ Without ever fighting for emancipation per se, the abolitionists would gain it through the abolition of the trade and the natural consequences which would follow.¹⁵

¹³Clarkson, Condition of Slaves, p. 5. The idea of the degradation of the oppressor is also found in Sharp (see below, Chapter V, p. 116), Benezet (Chapter VI, pp. 176-7), and Wesley (Chapter VII, p. 212). It is particularly interesting to note that this idea has continuity throughout the history of racial prejudice, finding full expression in the teaching of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. One of the earliest to suggest it however, was the Quaker John Woolman, see below, Chapter VI, p. 176.

¹⁴Although this natural flow to emancipation is not what actually happened following 1807, Clarkson still felt the principles were workable. In 1823 he continued to point out that good treatment leading to emancipation and a free labour force would bring about much greater prosperity than a slave labour system. He even cited a slave owner's successful experiment using this plan. (Clarkson, Condition of Slaves, pp. 31-38, 44.)

¹⁵In fact whereas Newton, Wilberforce, Ramsay and Wesley spoke of ending the slave trade or slavery, Clarkson (as well as Sharp and Benezet) devised specific plans to make practicable and to effect the emancipation of slaves. In this he demonstrates the unusual characteristic of being both an idealist and a practical thinker. He cited actual cases of emancipations which occurred smoothly: slaves who fought in the military and were freed to Nova Scotia, American slaves who fought for the British in the American Revolution and were emancipated in Trinidad, and slaves taken from illegal slavers and released at Sierra Leone (Clarkson, Condition of Slaves, pp. 15-17.)

So confident was Clarkson of this that in 1787 he could assure Dr. Davis (a clergyman of Monmouth) that the committee was not working toward emancipation.¹⁶ Similarly, in a letter to M. Beauvet he could assert that "The Colonial Slavery, sir, does not enter into our Plan. We are of the opinion that the Emancipation of the Slaves would be of no Benefit to them at present, would ruin some of their Proprietors, would endanger the Revenue for a time, and would be an Evil rather than a Good"¹⁷ And yet, emancipation was his final goal. In 1808 after the victory of the abolition of the trade he could speak about emancipation in temperate but hopeful terms:

Who knows but that emancipation, like a beautiful plant, may, in its due season, rise out of the ashes of the abolition of the Slave trade, and that, when its own intrinsic value shall be known, the seed of it may be planted in other lands? ¹⁸

But by 1823 the intensity would increase as he told the abolitionists:

. . . never to forget, that emancipation was included in the original idea of the abolition of the slave trade. Slavery was then as much an evil in their eyes as the trade itself . . . the extinction of it ought to be equally an object of their care. All the slaves in our colonies, whether men, women, or children, whether African or Creoles, have been unjustly deprived of their rights. There is not a master, who has the least claim to their services in point of equity. There is, therefore, a great debt due to them, and for this no Payment, no amends, no equivalent can be found, but a restoration of their liberty. ¹⁹

It is apparent that in the years following the abolition of the trade Clarkson, along with his fellow abolitionists realised that emancipation would not follow naturally when the supply of slaves was

¹⁶ Clarkson, History, I, p. 347.

¹⁷ Griggs, op. cit., p. 54.

¹⁸ Clarkson, History, Vol. II, p. 586. (This optimistic statement is the second last paragraph of his twelve hundred page History.)

¹⁹ Clarkson, Condition of Slaves, p. 7.

ended. It would have to be fought for, and as strenuously as the abolition of the trade had been. Clarkson, committed as ever to his fellow man, chose to remain in the fight. His commitment to full emancipation can be seen by the fact that in his final years he continued his efforts. If the abolition of the trade, or even the amelioration of the abuses of slavery had been his goal, he would have rested content after the 1807 victory, or most certainly after Parliament abolished Slavery in British Possessions in 1833. On the contrary, when these efforts were secured he pressed on to use his influence on behalf of the American negro.²⁰

II

ATTITUDE TOWARD THE IDEA OF NEGRO INFERIORITY

From all appearances Clarkson had a very high view of the negro race. Among their moral qualities which he admired he mentioned: "African gratitude, patience, fidelity, honour . . . [and] good sense"²¹ In a more technical area he felt their aptitude to be quite high. He cited the fact that while the Europeans on the coast of Africa would figure their math with pen and paper, the natives would often catch their errors, computing mentally.²² It was his observation that they were equally skillful in language, often

²⁰In 1841 (when 81 years old) Clarkson felt compelled to write on behalf of the American slaves: A Letter to the Clergy of the various Denominations, and to the Slave-Holding Planters in the Southern Parts of the United States of America (London, 1841): and again in 1844, (only two years before his death), A Letter to such Professing Christians in the Northern States of America, as have had no practical concern with Slave Holding . . . (London, 1844).

²¹Clarkson, Essay, p. 122.

²²Ibid., p. 125.

mastering several and serving as interpreters.²³ He felt them to be equal to the Europeans in mechanical arts and perhaps superior in hand work.²⁴ Likewise he praised their musical aptitude.²⁵

Where it appeared that the black man was not equal to the white, Clarkson subscribed to an "original equality of man,"²⁶ and attributed the apparent differences to lack of opportunity for development. He contended that the Africans were not different from the ancestors of Europeans who previously lived in a savage state.²⁷ "With respect to the liberal arts, their proficiency is certainly less; but not less in proportion to their time and opportunity of study; not less, because they are less capable of attaining them, but because they have seldom or ever an opportunity of learning them at all."²⁸

In support of these views Clarkson cited Benezet. He felt Benezet certainly should be capable of appraising the negroes, having taught them for many years:

That great man . . . had a better opportunity of knowing them than any person whatever, and he always uniformly declared, that he could never find a difference between their capacity and those of other people; that they

²³Ibid.

²⁴On at least two occasions (Alexander of Russia and William Pitt) Clarkson refuted the idea of negro inferiority by showing specimens of African handiwork, to demonstrate their outstanding craftsmanship. With Alexander at least, the method succeeded and support was pledged for the negro cause. (Griggs, op. cit., pp. 157-8)

²⁵Clarkson, Essay, p. 119.

²⁶Ibid., p. 50.

²⁷Ibid., p. 118.

²⁸Ibid., p. 119.

were as capable of reasoning as any individual Europeans; that they were as capable of the highest intellectual attainments; in short, that their abilities were equal, and that they only wanted to be equally cultivated, to afford specimens of as fine productions. 29

Unlike Wilberforce and Newton, Clarkson felt that the coastal natives were more advanced than those of the inland areas, due to exposure to advanced civilisations.³⁰ Both Newton and Wilberforce felt that contact with the white man (at least the kind of white man to be found on the coasts of Africa) only degraded the negro, thus the inland natives were more "advanced" or civilised, (see Chapters I and II, pp. 20, 47-8).³¹

²⁹ Clarkson, Essay, p. 123.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 123.

³¹ It is interesting here to note the possible development of ideas. Clarkson felt that coastal Africans were more advanced because of contact with the civilised world, even though this contact came through the slave trade. Wilberforce and Newton felt that the nature of trade determined whether it had a civilising effect or not. Since the slave trade was not "legitimate" the coastal Africans, in contact with Europeans involved in the slave trade were not as civilised as the insulated inlanders. An even more extreme position, held by others of the eighteenth century, maintained that all contact with outside Europeans had a deleterious effect on the Africans; they were better left to their own culture.

It would be presuming too much to say that these men saw the logical conclusions to their thought. However, it is worth noting these early differences and projecting them to their late nineteenth and twentieth century possible developed expressions. The position of Clarkson, Newton and Wilberforce would lead to cultural and racial interaction. The result would be the development of conversionism and the later development of trusteeship. While the trusteeship view did not grant equality to the negro, it believed that he would be helped by contact with civilised Europeans. A sort of "controlled integration", with parameters and specific roles clearly maintained, was seen as positive, at least to the negro.

On the other hand the position of cultural insulation, based on the premise that interchange, even educational, weakens the culture and mores of the respective groups, leads to apartheid. For an excellent study of the development of apartheid in South Africa (and the contributing role of the church) see Susan Rennie Ritner, "Salvation Through Separation. The role of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa in the formulation of Afrikaner Race Ideology", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1971.

The appearance of seeming inequality where lack of development existed was one thing. But where slavery was concerned, the apparent inequality of the negro was due to degradation, the far more overt effect of the institution. Little wonder, so Clarkson argued, that they appear to be inferior when we:

. . . depress their senses by hunger . . . when by incessant labour, the continual application of the lash, and the most inhuman treatment that imagination can devise, you overwhelm their genius, and hinder it from breaking forth. - No, - You confound their abilities by the severity of their servitude: for as a spark of fire, if crushed by too great a weight of incumbent fuel, cannot be blown into a flame, but suddenly expires, so the human mind, if depressed by rigorous servitude, cannot be excited to a display of those faculties, which might otherwise have shone with the brightest lustre. ³²

Clarkson summarised his view of negro equality saying:

. . . if the minds of the Africans were unbroken by slavery, if they had the same expectations in life as other people, and the same opportunities of improvement, either in the colonies or upon the coast, they would be equal, in all the various branches of science, to the Europeans, and . . . the argument that states them "to be an inferior link of the chain of nature . . . is wholly malevolent and false." ³³

While Newton's view of negro capacity seems to have changed from one of partial distrust and inequality when in the slaving business, to a defence of negro ability and morality, when an abolitionist, Clarkson's view was consistent throughout his adult life. In his earliest writings he praised negro capacity and admired negro art. Thirty years later, after close contact with Madame Christophe and her daughters, his attitudes appear not to have changed.³⁴ Clarkson's

³² Clarkson, Essay, p. 116.

³³ Ibid., p. 126.

³⁴ After the suicide of Henry Christophe, Haiti's black dictator until Oct., 1820, his wife and daughters lived with the Clarksons for several months. (Griggs, E. L. & Prator, C. H., Henry Christophe and Thomas Clarkson a Correspondence, [Los Angeles, 1952] pp. 75, 79).

contemporaries,³⁵ even among the abolitionists, were not always so accepting. He reported that "when Christophe's wife and daughters, all accomplished women, were brought or introduced by him to Wilberforce, and others in high life, there was a sort of shrink at admitting them into high society."³⁵ This possibly implies an interesting difference in the emotional responses (cultural prejudice?) of two great friends of the negro. Christine Bolt however, expresses her view that Clarkson's racial attitudes were advanced for Victorian England.³⁶

It is interesting to note that not only did Clarkson view negroes as equal to caucasians, but he valued this viewpoint in others, particularly others of a religious affiliation. Citing the Quakers he praised them for their views which embraced negro equality:

How many, professing themselves enlightened, even now view them [negroes] as a different species! 37
But in the minutes [Quaker], which have been cited, we have seen them uniformly represented as persons "ransomed by one and the same Saviour" - "as visited by one and the same light for salvation" - and "as made equally for immortality as others." 38

To Clarkson this perspective was not only praiseworthy, but a criterion for sound religion, and a "proof both of the reality and

³⁵Griggs, Thomas Clarkson, the Friend of Slaves, p. 147. Griggs is here quoting a conversation between Clarkson and the English painter, Benjamin Haydon. Christine Bolt (Victorian Attitudes to Race p. 229) cites the same incident but misses the fact that Wilberforce was one of those taken aback when introduced to the Christophes. She indicates that it was "he [Clarkson] and Wilberforce [that] introduced the refugees to their circle"

³⁶Bolt, op. cit., p. 229. In fact, Clarkson lived only into the first nine years of Victoria's reign (dying in 1846) and should actually be considered pre-Victorian.

³⁷In his essay of 1786 Clarkson had praised Beattie for refuting Hume's assertions of negro inferiority. See Essay, p. 126.

³⁸Clarkson, History, Vol. I, p. 117.

of the consistency of their religion."³⁹

Clarkson's egalitarianism was also a platform from which he attacked slavery. For him slavery could only be justified on the presupposition of the inferiority of the slave. Since he categorically denied this inferiority, the foundation of slavery crumbled.⁴⁰ This was such a significant fact to him that in his History (1808) he noted the point at which the House of Commons changed its view on negro inferiority. Although the bill for the abolition of the slave trade had failed (1791, 1792) he noted that the abolitionists had "gained one victory. We have obtained for these poor creatures the recognition of their human nature, which for a while, was most shamefully denied them."⁴¹ He footnoted that comment as follows: "This point was actually obtained by the evidence before the House of Commons; for, after this, we heard

³⁹Ibid., Vol. I, p. 117.

⁴⁰Clarkson, Essay, p. 55. It should here be pointed out that the slavery situations in Britain and America were quite different. After 1772 the question for the English involved either the slave trade to the West Indies, or slavery at that distance from home. It was a legislative question, involving policy. The percentage of the English population directly involved was relatively low; the distance to actual slavery was great.

By contrast, the American involvement with slavery was much more intimate. There was no insulating distance. More than a legislative question of policy, it was a public question involving individual livelihoods. Since the issue would be decided by the public, the myth of negro inferiority would have far greater significance than in England. Thus, the idea of negro inferiority was a much more used tool in America, especially among the public, to defend the entrenched institution. Had slavery not been outlawed in England by 1772, had it remained a question for the public sector rather than for members of Parliament, it is likely that the idea of negro inferiority would have continued to spread as it did in America. For example, Long's portrayal of negro inferiority would probably have been more widespread, and gained greater acceptance.

⁴¹Clarkson, History, Vol. II, p. 254.

no more of them as an inferior race."⁴² Wilberforce did not show this kind of optimism in regard to the House being enlightened about negro inferiority until 1823 - (see Chapter I p. 14).

Further, Clarkson dealt with negro inferiority exploring the biblical concept of the curse of Ham and the relationship between skin colour and inferiority. The former he divorced from negro inferiority and slavery by citing correspondence between Sharp and Bryant (a noted student of the Bible);⁴³ regarding the latter, he posited that there is no relationship between skin colour and inferiority,⁴⁴ but colour is a variation produced by climate over a period of time.⁴⁵

Finally, in Clarkson is evident a tendency which would be termed "germinal conversionism". There is far too much respect and admiration for the negro to approach anything resembling the much later trusteeship. On the other hand, he saw the African as very capable but underdeveloped and in need of enlightenment and exposure to civilisation.

Nowhere in Clarkson's writings are there strong injunctions of the white man's responsibility to civilise the black man. And yet wherever he met occasions of the white man working toward the conversion and development of the black man he offered high praise. For example, he mentioned Quaker admonitions to each other to "consider their slaves as branches of their own families, for whose spiritual instruction they would one day or other be required to give an account"⁴⁶ He noted that Penn had encouraged slaves to attend Quaker meetings and

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Clarkson, Essay, p. 131. See below, Chapter V (Sharp) p.139n.110.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 134.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 139.

⁴⁶Clarkson, Memoirs of . . . William Penn, Vol. II, pp. 219-20.

saw this as very positive.⁴⁷ Especially did he praise Penn for his efforts to convert the Indians. He saw Penn alone as the statesman who had "opened intercourse with barbarous nations for the sole and express purpose 'of reducing (as William Penn's charter expresses it) the savage nations to the love of civil society and the Christian religion.'" ⁴⁸ In these references Clarkson's response to the Indian seems nearly identical to his response to the negro, indicating his "pre-racial" attitude. But his support for the Christianising and civilising of others allows us to see him as being in sympathy with the tenets of later conversionism. The following instances show him to be more conscious of developmental differences and thus the need to convert and civilise, than conscious of differences based on race.

His long correspondence with Henry Christophe gives valuable insight into Clarkson's desires for the Haitians. At one point he encouraged Christophe to welcome Christian missionaries. At another he spoke of the possibility of an influx of American negroes, and noted that they were more accustomed to a higher form of government, freedom and trial by jury. Showing his awareness of the difference not only in black and white situations, but also in black cultures, he indicated his hope for the future development of Haiti: "This noble custom [trial by jury] cannot at present exist in Haiti, because your Majesty's subjects are not yet sufficiently enlightened by education to compose so distinguished a tribunal."⁴⁹ It is significant

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 221.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 450-51.

⁴⁹ Griggs and Prator, Henry Christophe and Thomas Clarkson a Correspondence. (Letter from Clarkson to Christophe, 28 Sept., 1819) p. 162. Underlining mine.

that he saw the solution in terms of culture, brought by American negroes. He did not see the Haitians as incapable of western standards.

So it appears that Clarkson held the negroes in high regard, and yet felt some responsibility for conversion and civilisation. Overall, he must be considered one of the most egalitarian persons of his age. Not only did he speak of the equality of the negro, he worked at convincing others of this truth (William Pitt and Alexander of Russia, among others). That Clarkson's views of equality were matched by his personal feelings is demonstrated by his open acceptance of the Christophes in his home. This is strongly indicative not only of his racial views setting him apart from others of his age, but of the genuineness of his egalitarianism.

CLARKSON: MOTIVATION

The driving force of Clarkson's adult life was the "cause": the abolition of the slave trade and slavery. He gave his life unrelentingly from the time he was twenty-five years old until his death at the age of eighty-six (except for the nine years from 1794 when he retired for reasons of health).⁵⁰ Although he first noticed the cause of antislavery through his literary ambition, he was soon driven by a nobler purpose. While researching for that initial essay the change occurred:

I was so overwhelmed with grief that I sometimes never closed my eyes during the whole night, and I no longer regarded my essay as a mere trial for literary distinction.

⁵⁰ Thomas Taylor, A Biographical Sketch of Thomas Clarkson, M.A., (London, 1839), pp. 96, 104.

My great desire was now to produce a work that should call forth a vigorous public effort to redress the wrongs of injured Africa. 51

In later years he viewed his life work as a sacred calling, "being assured that those feelings which pointed out to me the path I was to pursue must have sprung from a Holy source" ⁵² His involvement in the cause was "in obedience . . . to a higher Power," ⁵³ even the result of God's Providence. ⁵⁴ It is no wonder that he would so view his work. Before committing himself to fight slavery, he had taken deacon's orders and begun preparing for the ministry; certainly he saw his "call" and subsequent effort as a kind of ministry, and a most significant one. So bound together in his mind were Christianity and the abolition that when victory occurred, he said: "The victory is, in fact, if we wish to know who gained it - the triumph of Christianity over Barbarism!" ⁵⁵ Even in 1840, at the age of eighty, his decision to write a pamphlet to the American clergy regarding slave holding was the result of what he termed a "vision." ⁵⁶

⁵¹ Thomas Clarkson, A Portraiture of the Christian Profession and Practice of the Society of Friends: With a Biographical Sketch of the Author (no author given for the Biographical Sketch) London, 1869, 3rd edition, p. v.

⁵² Taylor, op. cit., p. 145.

⁵³ Clarkson, History, Vol. I, p. 230.

⁵⁴ Griggs quotes Clarkson saying: "I was formerly under Providence the originator, and am now unhappily the only surviving member of the Committee which was first instituted in this country in the year 1787, for the Abolition of the Slave Trade." (Thomas Clarkson, the Friend of Slaves, p. 183)

⁵⁵ Griggs, Thomas Clarkson, the Friend of Slaves, p. 187, and Taylor, op. cit., p. 146.

⁵⁶ Sketch of the Life of Thomas Clarkson, no author, (London, 1876), pp. 36-7.

Congruent with his view that the cause was his calling and a form of ministry, he did not hesitate to use scripture when appropriate. He avoided using isolated texts or prooftexts as he felt the proslavery advocates did, and asserted that the sense of scripture clearly spoke against slavery. He referred to the biblical principle (Matthew 25) of clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, etc., and in a sermon against slavery he used the Mosaic text: "Thou shalt not oppress a stranger, for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." (History, Vol. I, p. 418) Like both Wesley and Sharp, Clarkson's use of scripture was somewhat ahead of his day. In the age of "prooftexting", the advocates of slavery had been making full use of isolated passages which seemed to argue for slavery. Although not as thoroughly, Clarkson, like Sharp employed a much sounder hermeneutic: looking beyond the isolated text to the principle of the passage and the principles underlying all scripture. In this way he applied the deeper implications of Matthew 25 and Old Testament passages to the question of slavery.

Although antislavery was his specific calling, Clarkson felt that every person had something within him, planted by God which would move him to work for such a righteous cause: "If there be a radical propensity in our nature to do that which is wrong, there is on the other hand a counteracting power within it, or an impulse, by means of the action of the Divine Spirit upon our minds, which urges us to do that which is right."⁵⁷ And how well matched was the antislavery cause to this bent within man, because never was there a cause

. . . in which the duty of Christian charity could be so extensively exercised; never one, more worthy of the devotion of a whole life towards it; and that, if a man

⁵⁷ Clarkson, Essay, pp. 3-4.

thought properly, he ought to rejoice to have been called into existence, if he were only permitted to become an instrument in forwarding it in any part of its progress. 58

So, it is appropriate to say that Clarkson was motivated by a personal sense of calling, which blended with his concept of the duty of every Christian and the general tenor of scripture, regarding human relations.

Unquestionably Clarkson's sense of a "call" was strongly reinforced by his humanitarian tendencies. Early in his campaign he visited a ship that traded with Africa. When he saw the African trade items, products of African craftsmanship and ingenuity, he was almost overcome by the realisation that such artisans were being "reduced to a level with the brute creation" by slavery.⁵⁹

The strong humanitarian response is even evident in 1785 when Clarkson was writing his prize essay:

. . . No person can tell the severe trial, which the writing of it proved to me. I had expected pleasure from the invention of the arguments, from the arrangement of them, from the putting of them together, and from the thought in the interim that I was engaged in an innocent context for literary honour. But all my pleasure was damped by the facts which were now before me. It was but one gloomy subject from morning to night. In the day-time I was uneasy. In the night I had little rest. I sometimes never closed my eye-lids for grief. It became now not so much a trial for academical reputation, as for the production of a work, which might be useful to injured Africa. 60

Years later, while travelling through Britain to collect evidence against the trade, his evenings were spent reading letters and accounts. Again, his responses indicate his deep feelings for humanity:

⁵⁸ Clarkson, History, Vol. I, p. 229.

⁵⁹ Bolt, op. cit., pp. 228-29; Clarkson, History, Vol. I, p. 237.

⁶⁰ Clarkson, History, Vol. I, p. 209.

These accounts I could seldom get time to read till late in the evening, and sometimes not till midnight, when the letters containing them were to be answered. The effect of these accounts was in some instances to overwhelm me for a time in tears, and in others to produce a vivid indignation, which affected my whole frame. 61

How interesting to compare the humanitarianism and sensitivity of Clarkson, who could not even read the accounts without tears, with that of Newton, who only thirty-one years earlier lived with similar situations, expressing his praise and devotion to God, oblivious to the horrors of his cargo. Throughout Clarkson's writings there seems to be a natural compassion for his fellows.⁶²

The depth of Clarkson's humanitarianism is illustrated by the fact that his concern for others was not limited to the issue of slavery. His biographer, Griggs, indicates that in addition to his time-dominating antislavery activities, he "found time for other humanitarian activities."⁶³ Griggs lists some of these:

⁶¹Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 22-23.

⁶²After a very graphic description of the catching, transporting and selling of slaves, he told of the West Indian scene after the sale: Those not fit for sale were disposed in the harbour, ". . . the tragedy . . . immediately finished by the not more inhuman sharks, with which the harbour abounded," (Clarkson, Essay, p. 101; for the entire description, see pp. 81ff.) It is interesting that Clarkson spared no details, evoking much emotion describing the horrors of slavery. By contrast, Newton, the eyewitness, when writing as an abolitionist was comparatively mild in his descriptions. One must assume either a sharp difference in their involvement in the cause, or perhaps that Newton had not sufficiently dealt with his past to be able to relate, and thus relive the specifics.

⁶³Griggs, Thomas Clarkson, the Friend of Slaves, p. 159.

He shared in the formation of a peace society in 1815, for which he wrote a pamphlet, An Essay of the Doctrines and Practices of the Early Christians, as they relate to War. Crabb Robinson / a personal friend of Clarkson / notes on the back of a long letter from Clarkson, begging assistance for someone unjustly prosecuted in court, "A characteristic letter from the great abolitionist. He was a Quixote in his benevolence Sometimes rather injudicious." Southey speaks of Clarkson's interest in emigration as a means of alleviating distress and poverty among the working classes: "I had talked over just a plan of emigration as this, last summer with Clarkson, who had shipped off two or three families to Canada at the parish expense from his own parish, Playford, near Ipswich."

Clarkson also interested himself in the revision of the English penal code and in the diminution of the number of crimes for which capital punishment was the penalty. 64

Quoting an unidentified writer, Griggs further specifies:

Upwards of 20 widows have long been sustained by his bounty; several schools for the poor he supported; and there is not a poor neighbourhood around the Playford Hall who cannot testify of his benevolent regard. In fact, it is said there is not a poor person in the village who does not sleep under blankets furnished by his bounty. 65

Further, Clarkson is credited with supplying food, medicine, clothing and even work for the poor in his and the next parish. 66

Even in the years he had retired from the slave cause, for reasons of ill health, he assisted ten poor families. 67

While his benevolence touched various human needs, Clarkson saw the ending of slavery as humanity's greatest need. Although slavery was not society's only sin, he saw it as the predominant one. It was the epitome of the evils to be attacked; it was a "collective" or social sin. For him slavery was more identified with national sin than for

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 197.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 80.

Newton, and probably less than for Wilberforce (certainly less than for the later American evangelical abolitionists). But viewing it as a national social evil, Clarkson felt that even the "body politic" would be held accountable.⁶⁸ This is significant in that he saw the reality of collective evil and thus worked toward a solution that affected the social structure, not just the individual. However, rather than theologizing about it, Clarkson saw slavery very simply as a wrong, an evil which needed to be rectified. So obviously wrong was it that a person's character could be safely and accurately judged by his stand on abolition:

I have had occasion to know many thousand persons in the course of my travels on this subject; and I can truly say, that the part, which these took on this great question, was always a true criterion of their moral character. Some indeed opposed the abolition, who seemed to be so respectable, that it was difficult to account for their conduct; but it invariably turned out in a course of time, either that they had been influenced by interested motives, or that they were not men of steady moral principle. 69

Indeed slavery was so obviously wrong that he felt all Christians should be in the forefront of the attack. And when he looked over the growth of the abolition movement and the success of 1807, he attributed it not to the lovers of liberty, but to "the teachers of Christianity in those times."⁷⁰ His view that the slave trade ranked as a national sin can be seen in another of his comments following the same victory:

The stain of the blood of Africa is no longer upon us, of that we have been freed (alas, if it be not too late!) from a load of guilt, which has long hung like a millstone

⁶⁸ Clarkson, Essay, p. 165, also p. 162.

⁶⁹ Clarkson, History, Vol. II, pp. 581-2 (footnote).

⁷⁰ Ibid., Vol. I, p. 262.

about our necks, ready to sink us to perdition.⁷¹

Closely related to Clarkson's sense of being called, and to his deep humanitarianism is the moral obligation with which he viewed the cause. In his History can be seen this motive, associated with the joy that follows when the obligation has been fulfilled:

I scarcely know of any subject, the contemplation of which is more pleasing than that of the correction or of the removal of any of the acknowledged evils of life; for while we rejoice to think that the sufferings of our fellow-creatures have been thus, in any instance, relieved, we must rejoice equally to think that our own moral condition must have been necessarily improved by the change. 72

This obligation fell also to England who, if she were to end slavery in her Colonies, would ensure the eventual end of the trade in all the world.⁷³ The obligation was even greater because those oppressed by slavery in British Dominions were fellow British subjects.⁷⁴

Contained within Clarkson's motivation of moral obligation is his strict adherence to the principles of justice and truth. Early on he described his support of the unfortunate Africans as undertaking the "cause of injured innocence."⁷⁵ Implicit in his essay of 1823 (The Argument that Colonial Slaves Are Better Off Than The British Peasantry, Answered) is his high regard for truth and his recoiling at the planters' false assertions about slave conditions, thus his style in this essay of letting the truth speak for itself, by simply quoting the planters' paper, the Jamaica Royal Gazette.

⁷¹Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 583-84.

⁷²Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 1-2.

⁷³Clarkson, Essay, p. 56.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. xviii.

Finally it must be seen that Clarkson's involvement in the cause was the result of a strong intrinsic motivation. Whereas Newton seems to have responded to the evangelical antislavery influence, it appears that Clarkson helped develop that influence. Some of his less than conventional attitudes (such as support of the French Revolution and of the British boycott of West Indian produce)⁷⁶ would indicate that he was working more from inward principles than conventional values, those principles stemming from his sense of being "called" and his inherent humanitarianism. Further evidence for this theory of his motivation can be seen in Clarkson's lifelong total commitment and his work output. Describing his own labours prior to 1794 he relates:

For seven years I had a correspondence to maintain with four hundred persons with my own hand, I had some book or other annually to write on behalf of the cause. In this time I had travelled more than thirty-five thousand miles in search of evidence, and a great part of these journeys in the night. All this time my mind had been on the stretch. It had been bent too to this one subject; for I had not even leisure to attend to my own concerns. ⁷⁷

Clarkson's involvement was not that of a detached worker, but it absorbed his mental and emotional energies as well as his physical strength. The totality of his investment can be sensed in his response to discovering Falconbridge, a previous slave trader. Prior to this, Clarkson had met with little and far spaced success in procuring witnesses against the trade. Now, Falconbridge expressed that he had left the trade on principle, and would help the cause in any way he

⁷⁶By contrast, Wilberforce was opposed to the boycott, wanting to work strictly through the legitimate channels of power. He also was concerned about Clarkson's sympathies for the French Revolution.

⁷⁷Clarkson, History, Vol. II, pp. 469-70.

could. Clarkson was overjoyed:

This answer produced such an effect upon me, after all my former disappointments, that I felt it all over my frame. It operated like a sudden shock, which often disables the impressed person for a time. So the joy I felt rendered me quite useless, as to business, for the remainder of the day. 78

With this kind of commitment to the cause, and personal investment of energy, it is little wonder that his health broke and he had to retire from the cause in 1794. And yet the same facts point to a driving force within, that kept him going when his own energy and enthusiasm would have run dry. It is this force that would not let him rest after the British abolition of the slave trade (1807) and slavery (1833). "The United States and Brazil still tolerated slavery, and it was still legal in the colonies of France and Spain."⁷⁹ He focused his attention on American slavery, writing two tracts and corresponding with Lewis Tappan, William Lloyd Garrison and John Greenleaf Whittier.⁸⁰ It is said that at the age of eighty-four he had been working for the cause, eight hours per day, for the past three years.⁸¹

Because of his untiring work and relentless schedule, some have referred to Clarkson as the victim of a "martyr temperament."⁸² In fact, Clarkson did regard himself as the "slave to the Slave,"

⁷⁸Ibid., Vol. I, p. 353.

⁷⁹Griggs, Thomas Clarkson, the Friend of Slaves, p. 182.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Sketch of the Life of Thomas Clarkson, no author, p. 38.

⁸²Bolt, op. cit., p. 228.

but nowhere is there evidence to support the view of a martyr complex for his motivation. He was a man graced with the inner sensitivity of a true humanitarian, energized by a sense of the Divine Call upon his life. That he was "so completely absorbed in his final object" and "gave no thought to credit or reward"⁸³ is best seen in a comment by Coleridge:

I once asked Tom Clarkson whether he ever thought of his probable fate in the next world, to which he replied "How can I? I think only of the slaves in Barbadoes!"⁸⁴

Certainly an apt remark for a man who gave his life and health for his fellow man, and was content to work in the background while the notoriety fell to his co-workers.

⁸³Griggs, Thomas Clarkson, The Friend of Slaves, p. 189.

⁸⁴Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

JAMES RAMSAY

"Ramsay is dead! I have killed him!" These were the words of Molyneux's victorious announcement following Ramsay's natural death.¹ Indeed, Ramsay had been a threat to Molyneux and to all the West India interest. As a resident of nineteen years in the sugar colonies Ramsay supplied the antislavery cause with eye witness evidence.² From his return to England in 1781 until his death in 1789 he published no less than seven works relating to the slave trade.³ His work so aroused the hostility of the supporters of the slave trade that after he published his Essay, he became the target of severe libel from the West Indians.

Although Ramsay was a significant figure in the abolition of the slave trade, it is, no doubt, an overstatement to call him the key factor in the beginning of the cause, as Shyllon does.⁴ Certainly Ramsay played a part in attracting or confirming both Wilberforce and

¹R. I. & S. Wilberforce, Wilberforce, Vol. I, p. 235.
 "'Mr. Molyneux,' writes Mr. Stephen, 'announced the decease of the public enemy to his natural son in this island, in these terms'"

²After serving in the Royal Navy as surgeon for six years (stationed in the West Indies), Ramsay entered holy orders and served as a clergyman in the West Indies for nineteen years, 1762 to 1781. (Folarin Shyllon, James Ramsay The Unknown Abolitionist, [Edinburgh, 1977], pp. 2-3, 125.)

³1784; An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of the African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies
 1784; An Enquiry into the Effects of the Abolition of the Slave-Trade
 1785; A Reply to Personal Invectives and Objections
 1787; A Letter To James Tobin
 1788; Objections to the Abolition of the Slave-Trade With Answers
 1788; An Examination of the Rev. Mr. Harris's Scriptural Researches on the Licitness of the Slave-Trade
 1788; An Address on the Proposed Bill for the Abolition of the Slave-Trade.

⁴Shyllon, op. cit. p. 133.

Clarkson to the cause, but there is not sufficient evidence to suggest that "it was Ramsay, more than anyone else, who had driven the matter close to Wilberforce's heart."⁵ Ramsay's importance is in the nature of his evidence. His Essay was based on personal experience. "In this instance, the planters could not use their hitherto effective defence that the writer was relying on hearsay and secondary evidence. For on the contrary, Ramsay knew more than even most of the absentee planters resident in England about their plantations. This was the factor that enhanced the value of the Essay, and placed it in an unrivalled position."⁶

I

ATTITUDE TOWARD SLAVERY

A thorough study of Ramsay's writings indicates that he was opposed to the abuses of slavery, the slave trade, and to the institution of slavery itself. However, the degree of his opposition to each of these was different. Shyllon indicates that "Ramsay strove to abolish slavery and the slave trade because he held it both contrary to humanity, natural and moral law"⁷ On principle Ramsay could assert:

I deny that a man can ever be an object of property, except in the case of an atrocious crime, which applies not to one slave in a thousand, and excludes all children. The act that reduces him to slavery, is illegal and unjust; for it is impossible for a slave to receive a compensation for his liberty. 8

⁵Ibid., p. 86.

⁶Ibid., p. 44.

⁷Ibid., p. 32.

⁸James Ramsay, Objections to the Abolition of the Slave-trade with Answers, 2nd. ed., (London, 1788) p. 9. Hereafter referred to as "Objections".

So committed was he to this principle that he challenged the slave owners' rights to compensation should their slaves be freed. The owners had no more right to financial compensation than someone who had purchased a stolen horse has a right to keep him.⁹

Ramsay opposed slavery as an institution on numerous grounds. His strongest attack was against the inefficiency and lack of profitability of slavery. He further maintained that it was in opposition to religion, natural law, and the law of nations.

Drawing the contrast between free and slave labour, Ramsay showed the inefficiency of slavery:

. . . I am firmly of opinion, that a sugar plantation might be cultivated to more advantage, and at much less expence [sic], by labourers who were free-men, than by slaves. Men who, like slaves, are ill treated, ill clothed, and worse fed, who labour not with any view to their own profit, but for that of a master, whom for his barbarity they perhaps abhor, have not strength, nor spirits, nor hope to carry them through their task. A freeman, labouring for himself, in the earnings of his wages, whose food is portioned out by himself, not by an unfeeling boy overseer; who feels his own vigour, who looks forward to the conveniences of life as connected with his industry, will surely exert more strength, will shew more alacrity, than a starved, depressed, dispirited wretch, who drawls out his task with the whip over him. 10

Motivation was one problem, but management was another; both of which were more easily solved with free labour. Poor management accounted for

⁹ Ibid., p. 10. In another context he spoke to the same point: ". . . we shall as soon think of giving a recompense to a highwayman, chained down in a prison dungeon, for abstaining from the robberies and murders he probably might have committed if he had been allowed to go at liberty" (Ramsay, An Address on the Proposed Bill for the Abolition of the Slave-Trade, [London, 1788], p. 31). Hereafter referred to as "Address".

¹⁰ James Ramsay, An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies, (London, 1784), pp. 119-20. Hereafter referred to as "Essay".

inconsistent work output: "140 or 160 slaves often cultivate as much land, and send as much sugar to market as 220 slaves."¹¹ But even animal labour was far more efficient: ". . . one horse and cart will do the work of forty slaves."¹² Ramsay maintained that ". . . the labour of a slave pays not for his cost and expense in seasoning."¹³ So strongly did Ramsay focus on the inefficiency and unprofitability of slavery in his early works, that a cursory reading leaves the impression that he opposed slavery and the slave trade only on that basis.

However, Ramsay also drew on religion to show that slavery was blasphemous:

That the heavenly Preacher of peace and good will towards men, should be supposed to have encouraged an unnatural state of society, which, in its very institution, must counteract in the superior every benevolent inclination from man to man; and must go far to suppress in the inferior every desire after that intellectual improvement, and heavenly happiness, to point out the way to which was the very design of his humiliation; is such blasphemy against the divine goodness and condescension of his mission, and is so flatly contradicted by the whole tenor of his doctrine, as to be utterly unworthy of an answer. St. Paul again is pressed into the service of slavery, against the plain grammatical sense of the expression in the original, and the whole scope of his argument 14

Ramsay further asserted that ". . . originally Providence never designed any rational, or accountable creature for such a depressed brutish state, as that of African slaves in the British colonies."¹⁵

¹¹Ramsay, Objections, p. 62.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁴Ramsay, Essay, p. 46.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 185.

Such a state cannot be imagined as existing under the government of God: it is blasphemy against his benevolence even to suppose it. The inanimate and brute creation was fitted for and submitted to man's dominion; but man himself was left independent of every personal claim in his fellows. 16

Referring to the Bible Ramsay came to grips with the pro-slavery argument that slavery was sanctioned by God in the Old Testament. He asserted that if we use the Old Testament sanction, we must also adhere to its restrictions. "We must imitate the example of the Jews, if we claim their permission of holding slaves:"¹⁷ The Jews could not force their slaves to work on the sabbath and slaves that they had had sexual relations with must thereafter be treated as wives, and not sold. He also used the same argument that Granville Sharp used, maintaining that Jews were forbidden to hold fellow Jews as slaves beyond six years, and since the coming of Christ, all men are brothers.¹⁸ Thus any slavery beyond six years was in conflict with the Old Testament law.¹⁹ In refuting Raymund Harris,²⁰ Ramsay dealt specifically with Harris' statements from the scripture, both his general and specific references. Harris, a Roman Catholic, had set

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 233.

¹⁷ Ramsay, Objections, p. 76.

¹⁸ Granville Sharp, The Just Limitation of Slavery in the Laws of God, (London, 1776), pp. 18-19. See Chapters: I p. 6; V pp. 133-5; VI p. 164.

¹⁹ Ramsay, Objections, p. 76; Ramsay, Examination of the Rev. Mr. Harris's Scriptural Researches on the Licitness of the Slave-Trade, (London, 1788), p. 22. Hereafter referred to as "Examination".

²⁰ In 1788, Harris, an ex-Jesuit, wrote Scriptural Researches on the Licitness of the Slave-Trade, Shewing its Conformity with the Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion, Delineated in the Sacred Writings of the Word of God (Liverpool, 1788). Within a year, at least six refutations to Harris were published, one of which was Ramsay's.

the ground rules well suited to his Protestant readers: the bible alone, not tradition or practice, could determine the "licitness" of the trade. While he felt that the abuses were wrong, and must be regulated, the trade was not inherently wrong.²¹ Ramsay took issue with this on the basis of the golden rule, asserting that the abuses of the slave trade were fully inseparable from it:

But if these abuses cannot possibly be prevented
(for are we to oppress and murder according to law?)
than the greatest advantages attending any practice
must be abandoned, till a method shall be discovered,
of separating them from iniquity and bloodshed. 22

Challenging Harris' exegesis and interpretation Ramsay said: "In the scriptures servants are frequently mentioned; but, in this dissertation, they are transformed into 'slave trade.'"²³ He went on to say that while the bible does specify certain forms of slavery, "nothing in the Bible countenances a trade in slaves."²⁴ Throughout, Ramsay accused Harris of inappropriately making ancient slavery (Egyptian) the equivalent of the eighteenth century slave trade; ". . . let him reduce his Liverpool [sic] slave trade to the circumstances of a Jew serving his brother for six years, and we shall have few objections to bring against it."²⁵

In dealing with the very difficult situation of Philemon in the New Testament, Ramsay suggested a great difference between the slavery of the first and the eighteenth centuries. According to Ramsay, Paul requested the reconciliation between Philemon and Onesimus:

²¹Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, p. 544.

²²Ramsay, Examination, p. 6.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 22.

But from the manner in which the apostle solicits this favour it is clear the situation of Onesimus in the family was desirable for he requests it as a favour to Onesimus, and considers not his interposition, as the conferring of an obligation on Philemon. All this is very opposite to that West Indian slavery with which this of Onesimus is compared. For the master only is considered here, neither the feelings nor profit of the slave is taken into account. 26

Finally, drawing on the history of Christianity, Ramsay said that ". . . wherever the gospel has prevailed, it has in fact abolished it [slavery]." ²⁷ Thus, he brought religion in general, Christianity and scripture in particular to bear against slavery as an institution.

In addition to religion, the law of nature spoke against slavery. Ramsay subscribed to a view "that each man has a station for which nature has intended him", ²⁸ and he was convinced that "the artificial, or unnatural relation of master and slave" stood "opposed to this law of nature." ²⁹ In fact,

had nature intended negroes for slavery; she would have endowed them with many qualities which they now want. Their food would have needed no preparation, their bodies no covering; they would have been born without any sentiment for liberty; and, possessing a patience not to be provoked, would have been incapable of resentment or opposition 30

Ramsay believed that "the slave has a natural right to freedom." ³¹

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 25-6. Cf. Granville Sharp, Chapter V, p. 137.

²⁷ Ramsay, Examination, p. 24 (the same thought is stated in Essay, p. 47).

²⁸ Ramsay, Essay, p. 3.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 234.

³¹ Ramsay, Objections, p. 11.

Even the most basic and natural law dictates against slavery, where "in the arbitrary relation of master and slave, no law restrains the one, no election or compact secures the other. The master may invade the dearest rights of humanity, and trample on the plainest rules of justice."³² And since the purpose of society "is the extension and operation of law, and the equal treatment and protection of the citizens . . . slavery, . . . being the negation of law, cannot arise from law, or be compatible with it."³³

Regarding the law of nations justification of slavery (after self defence, the victor has the right to enslave his opponent), Ramsay took an approach similar to Montesquieu's, stating that

a man contending with a man in a state of nature, may put his adversary to death, to place his own life out of danger. But when his safety is effected, he loses all power over his adversary's life. 34

In addition to arguing against slavery from the bases of religion, nature and profitability, Ramsay spoke against it because of the basic issue of humanity. It is interesting to note that he saw the same problem of human degradation that Wilberforce and Clarkson developed so effectively.³⁵ Very concisely, Ramsay described the cyclic effect of slavery and degradation, each supporting the other: "Oppression makes the wretches stupid, and their stupidity becomes their crime, and provokes

³²Ramsay, Essay, p. 15.

³³Ibid., p. 18.

³⁴Ramsay, Objections, pp. 44. Cf. M. de S. Montesquieu, The Spirit of Laws, 2 Vols., trans. Mr. Nugent, 2nd edition, (London, 1752) Vol. I, p. 337. This is a common eighteenth century argument, used also by Blackstone, Wesley and Benezet.

³⁵See Chapter I, (Wilberforce) pp. 7-10, 15-17, Chapter III, (Clarkson) pp. 58 & 64.

their farther punishment."³⁶ Later in the work he expressed the same concept: "Human nature, wherever found in the same debased state [as slavery] would shew itself in the same worthless manner. Nor is it an argument for straitening, but for relaxing, and at last breaking, the chain of slavery."³⁷ The result of this degradation was the justification of harsh treatment of slaves:

And the master having established these premises generally, [the inferiority of the slave, deduced from his degraded behaviour] and complimented himself with a place among the superior beings, fairly concludes himself loosed from all obligations, but those of interest, in his conduct towards them. 38

This argument was widely used by other abolitionists; Benezet, as early as 1762, Sharp, in 1769, and Wesley, in 1774. Clarkson however, developed the cycle concept further in his work of 1823, showing that the oppressor as well as the oppressed is degraded by slavery. Wilberforce used the concept in his speech of 1789 and was probably indebted to either Ramsay or Clarkson, or both of them, having had much contact with them by that time.³⁹

Were the above references the only comments Ramsay had about slavery, one could reasonably conclude that he was single-mindedly opposed to the institution of slavery. However, in each of his writings, Ramsay

³⁶Ramsay, Essay, p. 68 (1784)

³⁷Ibid., p. 172.

³⁸Ibid., p. 231.

³⁹It appears that Ramsay had been an important contributor to Wilberforce's first antislavery speech before the House of Commons. Shyllon (p. 5) cites a newspaper response from The World, 26 May, 1789: ". . . upon [Ramsay's] evidence alone, some of the leading arguments of Mr. W[illiam] Wilberforce were in fact rested."

expressed sentiments which soften his opposition. For example, if the choice were only between immediate emancipation and continued slavery, Ramsay would opt for the latter: "To make a slave free, who cannot earn an honest living, would be inhuman and impolitic. It is letting loose on society a thief in despair."⁴⁰ In fact, he felt that with improved conditions and the right policies eventually leading to manumission, "The slave trade . . . might be made to take a new shape, and become ultimately a blessing to thousands of wretches"⁴¹ The "new shape" Ramsay had in mind was basically a voluntary submission to slavery of a temporary kind. Slaves could be brought over from Africa, serve in a system of regulated slavery involving task work whereby they could eventually purchase their freedom. They would gradually become civilised, contributing members of society.⁴²

⁴⁰Ramsay, Essay, p. 283.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 292-93.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 291-93. Because of the significance of Ramsay's rationale to the position taken in this chapter, his full argument on conditional, temporary slavery is here given:

"I have now laid before the public what I supposed might bear the light; not all I have thought, not all I have written on the subject. In many points sentiment has struggled with the selfishness of the age, and been obliged to suppress many a generous wish; the feelings of benevolence have been forced to give way to the suggestions of narrow policy; and even a sense of the public interest has been made to yield to private prejudice. Yet, if our slaves were once accustomed to taste only a few of the sweets of society, a little of the security of being judged by known laws, they would double their application to procure the comforts and conveniences of life; and, with their additional property, would naturally rise in their rank in society. Many, especially if our plan of working them by task were to take place, would, in time, be able to purchase their own freedom. Their demands for manufactures would increase, and extend our trade; they would acquire a love for the country and government that shewed this attention to them. The labour of such as become free might, for some time, be regulated on the same plan as that of labourers in England. Under the awe of, or rather assisted by, a few regular troops, they might safely be trusted with arms for the defence of themselves, their families, their own, and patron's property. Then would the colonies enjoy a security from foreign attacks that no protection from Europe can afford them.

The "ultimately a blessing to thousands of wretches" facet simply meant that having gone through this civilising process - made possible by a regulated, humane and possibly temporary slavery - the Africans would be far better off than if left alone in their darkness. The price of slavery would be a worthwhile investment to bring about the eventual upgrading of Africans, and the process would be ongoing: as slaves purchased their freedom, new volunteers from Africa would fill their ranks.

Citing a proposed plan (Fletcher's) of controlled slavery for vagabonds and thieves, Ramsay condoned it as a kind of welfare, labour

(Footnote 42 continued from page 89)

The minds of these our fellow-creatures, that are now drowned in ignorance, being thus opened and improved, the pale of reason would be enlarged; Christianity would receive new strength; liberty new subjects. The slave trade, in its present form the reproach of Britain, and threatening to hasten its downfall, might be made to take a new shape and become ultimately a blessing to thousands of wretches, who, left in their native country, would have dragged out a life of miserable ignorance; unknowing of the hand that framed them, unconscious of the reason of which they were made capable; and heedless of the happiness laid up in store for them." Ramsay's footnote to page 293 includes:

"This is on the supposition that the slave trade could be conducted without that violence and injustice to individuals, and enormous loss of lives in the passage from Africa, and, during the seasoning in the colonies, that now accompanies it." "They must offer themselves willingly for the voyage, and be better accommodated [sic] and treated during the course of it."

This same argument was propounded by Evangelicals as well, notably, James Habersham and William Knox. Habersham was George Whitefield's friend and successor at Bethesda (Whitefield's orphanage in Georgia, which maintained a slave labour force). Knox became an advisor to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.G.) regarding the Codrington Estates, and published an apologia for slave holding. Both men felt that slavery was a worthwhile price to pay for evangelising the black men of Africa. Decades later, Knox' argument would be echoed by American pro-slavery religious leaders such as Thornwall. For an excellent article on pro-slavery Evangelicals, see Leland J. Bellot, "Evangelicals and the Defense of Slavery in Britain's Old Colonial Empire," Journal of Southern History, Vol. XXXVII, (1971), pp. 19-40.

It is interesting to see how close Ramsay came in the above argument to a position that justified slavery for conversionist purposes.

and rehabilitation system:

Such a state would be far beyond the condition of a vagabond, a wretch, that regards neither divine nor human laws, but wallows in every impurity and low vice. These regulations, properly pursued for one generation, would annihilate the evil; the very dread of being sold, and working at the will of another, would recover the greatest part of them to labour and society. 43

In this statement Ramsay was not simply condoning slavery, he was saying that under the right conditions it could be the lesser of two evils.

It could be more desirable than the life of a thief or vagabond.

Further, he was also pleading for improved conditions for slaves:

"Now, however inadmissible such a state of servitude may be . . .

would heaven, that the slavery in our sugar colonies were only what is here [Fletcher's system] proposed. We must then drop many of our objections against it."⁴⁴ In this last statement, Ramsay's case against slavery weakens. If it could be controlled and humane, would slavery then be more acceptable? It appears that for Ramsay, if the ends of civilising and Christianising were met, the means of slavery (under careful and humane management) could be justified.⁴⁵

Similarly, in 1788, in his Objections With Answers, Ramsay partially avoided the question "Is slavery lawful?" by insisting that slavery was not under attack. The object of the fight was the slave trade. He then addressed the question, responding: "We may allow its [slavery's] lawfulness in any case, where it can be proved, that injustice, murder, oppression, and avarice, has not been exercised."⁴⁶

⁴³Ramsay, Essay, pp. 38-42, quote from p. 42.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 43-44.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 291-3.

⁴⁶Ramsay, Objections, p. 33.

However, in the context of all of Ramsay's writings, it is conceivable that his seeming acceptance of slavery under the right conditions was merely a "straw man", only theoretically possible, since the wrong conditions appeared to be inherent in the contemporary pattern of slavery:

Slavery in its mildest shape, has something dangerous and threatening to virtue. 47

Indeed, whatever there is generally amiss in the conduct of masters to their slaves, arises not so much from any particular depravity in them [masters] as men, as from the arbitrary unnatural relation that exists between them and their wretched dependents; the effects of which, neither sentiment nor morality can at all times prevent. 48

Be that as it may, the system of procuring slaves was inherently wrong because: ". . . no man is originally reduced into a state of slavery but by such methods"⁴⁹ Ramsay had just mentioned that the slave trade's methods involve murder, starvation, oppression, suffocation and exile.⁵⁰

In fact, while Ramsay at times avoided the issue of the lawfulness of slavery, or seemingly vacillated between strong opposition and conditional acceptance, he was consistently and vehemently opposed to the slave trade. In his Address on the Proposed Bill for the Abolition of the Slave Trade (1788) he spoke so strongly against the trade on religious,

⁴⁷Ramsay, Essay, p. 147.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 69 (the same thought is in Objections, p. 52).

⁴⁹Ramsay, Examination, p. 27.

⁵⁰Ibid.

economic and moral grounds that one gets the impression again that if the trade were ended, abuses would cease and slavery would improve perhaps to a level of acceptability.

If certain evils were possibly inherent in the institution of slavery, many evils were definitely inherent in the slave trade, ". . . a traffic, which is founded on murder, and cannot be separated from it."⁵¹ The solution was clear: "The simple abolition of the trade . . . will do everything at present for the slave, that humanity requires. If any abuses remain, they may be regulated as discovered, without injury to the master's property, or his just authority over it."⁵² And better treatment would follow as a matter of course because the lack of fresh slaves would "bring the planter to a sense of his interest."⁵³

Having spent nineteen years in a slave society, Ramsay's concern was, understandably, improved treatment of the slaves, both physically and spiritually. In commenting on the correspondence between Benezet and the S.P.G. Ramsay supported Dr. Burton's goal of humane treatment of slaves.⁵⁴ But he was convinced that such treatment would never occur as long as the slave trade continued. Here he took issue with the S.P.G., indicating that they were contending for slavery as it was in the time of the apostles, with little awareness of the atrocities of the "Liverpool slave trade."⁵⁵ The writings of Ramsay leave no doubt that

⁵¹Ramsay, Objections, p. 27.

⁵²Ibid., p. 51.

⁵³Ibid., p. 13.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 33.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 33-34.

he was unremittingly opposed to the trade in slaves. It was based on oppression and murder. The only viable choice was to abolish it.

When the slave trade was abolished, and better treatment followed for the slaves, what was to ultimately become of them? Ramsay spoke in favour of emancipation, but only if it should occur when the slaves had been sufficiently prepared for freedom. Under no circumstances did he feel they were ready at that time (1789). When speaking for the cause of abolition he made his position clear:

. . . the present plan aims only at the abolition of the African slave trade. It meddles not with slaves already in the colonies; if it did, that sympathy, which first incited me to plead their claim to better treatment, would force me to . . . protest against the indiscreet measure [emancipation]. All our slaves are not yet generally in a state, wherein full liberty would be a blessing. Like children, they must be restrained by authority, and led on to their own good. But it would be insidious not to declare, that humanity looks forward to full emancipation, whenever they shall be found capable of making a proper use of it. 56

Ramsay's next statement indicates his confidence in the planter class, as well as a certain naïvete about how the system of amelioration and eventual emancipation would function if left alone: "But this [full emancipation] may be left to the master's discretion."⁵⁷

From the Old Testament Ramsay drew support for his view that the slaves were not yet ready for freedom:

When Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt, he was under the necessity of training them up to be an independent people, by multiplied forms and strict discipline, for the space of forty years. And it is apparent, from their behaviour during this long period, that slavery had so thoroughly debased their minds, as

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

to have rendered them incapable of the exertions necessary for their settlement in the promised land, till all those who had grown up as slaves in Egypt, had fallen in the wilderness, and laws and regulations worthy of a free people had taken place among them. This is a case full in point, and may suggest hints worthy of the legislature. 58

And in order to prepare those whom "slavery had so thoroughly debased," Ramsay believed the first step would occur naturally when planters improved slave conditions from the motive of self interest. Regulations would have to follow, and these he specified in his 1784 Essay, regarding marriage, food provisions, punishment and overall treatment. "These regulations would lay a foundation for that far distant view which we take of this subject, the time when liberty shall claim every exiled African for her own child."⁵⁹ It is interesting to note that four years after publishing his Essay, Ramsay suggested that the writing of regulations was the task of the island assemblies, not of Parliament, "lest, while attempting to regulate their treatment, it confirm the bonds of slavery."⁶⁰

Thus we see that Ramsay was consistently opposed to the slave trade and he spoke favourably of emancipation, when properly prepared for. But in light of his equivocal statements on slavery, what were his genuine views on the institution? Perhaps the clearest way to interpret these is to view them as emanating from Ramsay as idealist, and as pragmatist.

⁵⁸ Ramsay, Essay, p. 279 (footnote).

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 286.

⁶⁰ Ramsay, Objections, p. 9.

As an idealist Ramsay transcends the values of the eighteenth century and condemns the institution of slavery on moral and religious grounds. He expresses his innermost values when he asserts the impossibility of owning another human being as property. The abuses are inherent in the institution. If the idealist were his only spokesman, we would hear solely the anti-slavery principles that Ramsay sometimes expresses. More often however, the pragmatist in Ramsay comes forth and decries slavery because it is unprofitable and inefficient. And then, getting his hands on something more tangible than the principle of slavery, he attacks the slave trade. As this happens he repeatedly pleads for improved treatment of slaves, which he says will only happen with the abolition of the trade. Thus, quid pro quo, he is willing to give up his most ideal principle of abolishing slavery if he can gain an ameliorated system of slavery that removes the cruelty and harshness that he witnessed for so long. As he writes it is almost as if he relinquishes his highest ideals (which seem unattainable) and becomes a child of his age again, accepting a form of slavery if it can only be rid of the horrors of the slave trade and the injustice of the West Indies.

II

ATTITUDE TOWARD THE IDEA OF NEGRO INFERIORITY

In forming his opinion of negroes, Ramsay had the advantage of first hand experience that neither Clarkson nor Wilberforce could claim. His nineteen years in the West Indies had exposed him to the slave society, which he came to regard as the most degraded of all mankind. In spite of this, Ramsay demonstrates a remarkable lack of prejudice, especially when compared to contemporaries such as David Hume and Edward Long.

If Ramsay vacillated on the inherent rightness or wrongness of slavery, he was totally consistent in his view of the negro, and outspoken

in regard to their abilities and potential. In fact, his Essay discredited negro inferiority so effectively that Curtin describes it as "the best anti-racist tract of the eighteenth century."⁶¹

Perhaps one of the reasons Ramsay addressed the issue is that he recognised supposed inferiority as a strong justification for slavery. This was in contrast, he said, to ancient slavery, when the master did not suppose "himself of an higher race"⁶² But even if one race were inferior to another, which was not the case, that gave no justification for the practice of slavery: "Will those who plead for laws in favour of horses, maintain that negroes are to be trepanned, murdered by thousands, and enslaved for the indulgence of our avarice?"⁶³

While Ramsay did not allow for slavery on the basis of inferiority, he did posit that there are different stations, or ranks among all mankind, and these are designed by God. Slavery however, fits nowhere in this scheme but can "be traced to the infernal enemy of all goodness."⁶⁴ These ranks are determined by natural abilities and each rank has its own rights. Echoing the sentiments of John Locke, Ramsay believed that "all, as far as is consistent with general good, must be left to the free use of their powers and acquisitions, or of life, liberty, and property."⁶⁵ In contrast to this, Ramsay pointed out the American ideal which "contended for the present actual equality of all men, with an exception to their own slaves."⁶⁶ Ramsay would take issue with this on

⁶¹Curtin, The Image of Africa, p. 55.

⁶²Ramsay, Essay, p. 191.

⁶³Ramsay, Objections, p. 36.

⁶⁴Ramsay, Essay, p. 3.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 17.

two counts: all men are not actually equal, but have their stations; slaves should not be placed lower than the various stations of others, but with all others have their proportionate right to life, liberty and property.

For Ramsay, the argument of negro inferiority as a justification for slavery was erroneous because it was based on a false assumption. In his Objections to the Abolition of the Slave Trade With Answers, he confronted the issue directly:

Objection 17. Negroes are an inferior race of beings.
 Answer 17. This is boldly affirmed by Mr. Estwick:
 but every man of candour acquainted with
 them will deny it. 67

In response to the suspicion of David Hume that negroes are "naturally inferior",⁶⁸ Ramsay said: "But I trust his assertion, which certainly was made without any competent knowledge of the subject, will appear to have no foundation, either in reason or nature."⁶⁹ It is significant that Ramsay was speaking out of years of interacting with those being discussed. He knew them personally. He had served them as physician and clergyman and he could "positively deny" "that there is any difference between the European and African mental powers"⁷⁰

In contrast to Hume, Edward Long had spent time with negroes, and was speaking as an historian and a "scientist." But Ramsay discounted his thesis of negro inferiority by contesting his statement that Mulattoes cannot breed successfully together as they come from two different species.

⁶⁷ Ramsay, Objections, p. 36.

⁶⁸ David Hume, Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects, A new Edition (London, 1758), p. 125.

⁶⁹ Ramsay, Essay, p. 198.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 229.

For Ramsay, the physician, the argument was contrary to the truth of experience.⁷¹ In this instance, "Ramsay used the critical rationalism associated with science in a way the 'scientists' had neglected to do."⁷²

Ramsay's experience had not made him blind to differences between the races, and he realised that differences often led to mistaken assumptions:

We are apt, like the old Greeks, to term everything barbarous, that differs from our own artificial manners. But let any man read Mr. Matthews Account of Guinea, professedly published to vindicate the slave trade, and say whether they have not laws and customs worthy of the limitation of the most enlightened nations, and possess not a knowledge of agriculture and arts, that wants only an extension of observation to be beforehand with several nations in Europe. 73

Although phrenology, according to Curtin was not in vogue until the nineteenth century,⁷⁴ Ramsay anticipated and refuted it. Pointing out the absurdity of equating intelligence with skull size he suggested that ". . . our competitors for power, instead of wasting that nation's time in a war of words, should each submit his head to this simple trial of its capacity."⁷⁵ Equally absurd, "colour [was] a precarious foundation for genius"⁷⁶ In fact, all visible differences between blacks and whites, ". . . should they even mark a different race . . . can in no respect determine their inferiority."⁷⁷ Ramsay

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 239-40.

⁷²Curtin, op. cit., p. 56.

⁷³Ramsay, Objections, pp. 37-8.

⁷⁴Curtin, op. cit., p. 234.

⁷⁵Ramsay, Essay, p. 222.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 215.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 219.

argued: ". . . allowing all these [differences], we want a link to connect them with inferiority."⁷⁸ From his own observation he concluded that there was "... . no difference between the intellects of whites and blacks, but such as circumstance and education naturally produce."⁷⁹ As could be expected, his view of the equality of mankind, at least in potential form was consistent with his belief in monogenesis, which he held to be "consistent and analogical, [since] in certain attributes and qualities, in the mental powers, all mankind agree."⁸⁰

In addition to physical and cultural differences, Ramsay was certainly aware of the limited capacity exhibited by the negro slave. While Edward Long would explain this in terms of inferiority, Ramsay felt it was simply the result of slavery and its degradation.⁸¹ Like Wilberforce, he was convinced that "human nature, where-ever found in the same debased state, would shew itself in the same worthless manner."⁸² As indicated earlier, the problem was the cycle of slavery and degradation. Slavery debased the negroes to the extent that they began to act the part of an inferior. Their actions then reinforced their masters' justification for treating them as inferiors.

In spite of this, Ramsay was quite sure that with proper regulation, treatment and conditions, the negroes were capable of improvement and development. His Essay describes a system for such improvement:

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 212.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 203.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 208.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 229.

⁸²Ibid., pp. 172-3.

He outlined a comprehensive plan, embodying religious education, special protective laws, the appointment of official protectors to whom a slave could appeal, the punishment of cruel masters, the encouragement of marriage, the regulation of food, clothing, and rest, the assignment of task work, the assurance of homes and garden plots, the granting of self-government in minor matters, and the adoption of a plan for manumission. Such a program was intended to prepare the slaves for far distant emancipation. 83

For Ramsay, the improvements would entail more than the social and physical. He expected an increase in intellectual ability over a period of three generations, the result of better brain development made possible by improved conditions for pregnant women.⁸⁴

With his view that the negro was fully human, and not in the least inferior, Ramsay felt a strong sense of Christian obligation to their spiritual needs. As a resident of the West Indies he had worked for their conversion and Christian nurture, providing special times of service for them in the church, and special times of instruction for them in his home.⁸⁵ He believed that "Christianity obliges us to instruct and inform the mind",⁸⁶ and the very title of his first work on slavery, An Essay on the Conversion and Treatment of African Slaves is indicative of this concern for his fellow man. From these considerations, and his overall view of the negro, Ramsay can be placed squarely within the ranks of the early conversionists. He was very explicit that race is not the significant factor in human differences, but conditions, education and exposure to Christianity are.

⁸³ Frank J. Klingberg, The Anti-Slavery Movement in England, A Study in English Humanitarianism, (New Haven, Conn., 1926) p. 64.

⁸⁴ Ramsay, Essay, pp. 227-28.

⁸⁵ Shyllon, op. cit., p. 7.

⁸⁶ Ramsay, Objections, p. 75.

The strongest example of Ramsay's staunch conversionism occurs in the conclusion of his Essay, where he posited a system of temporary slavery (referred to above). He maintained that better treatment and the prospect of freedom would lead to a very happy situation, as opposed to being left in Africa where negroes: ". . . would have dragged out a life of miserable ignorance; unknowing of the hand that framed them" ⁸⁷ This passage is footnoted by the condition that such a slave trade must be conducted without violence or the huge losses of the middle passage, and by the willingness of the would be slaves. ⁸⁸ But the significant aspect of this passage is Ramsay's view of the hopelessness of the Africans in their present situation. He saw them as utterly dependent on the European; he saw the European as responsible to give the Africans the light of Christianity. In contrast to Wilberforce, Ramsay saw the African culture even at its best, in darkness. Conversion to Christianity and Christian culture must take place, even though it may involve a continuing form of temporary slavery. In this one passage we glimpse a fleeting paternalism in Ramsay (perhaps the result of his long tenure with those so degraded by unregulated slavery). Although he had strong views of racial equality, for that equality to be realised, to be actual, he felt the Africans (even at the cost of temporary slavery) must be Christianised. In the light of the rest of Ramsay's statements, this passage is perhaps best interpreted as an expression of his commitment to his faith, and his strong sense of obligation for carrying the gospel and its civilising power to the ends of the world. Undoubtedly, Ramsay reflects the strongest conversionist stance yet to be found in the men studied.

⁸⁷ Ramsay, *Essay*, pp. 292-93. (see above p. 89, especially note 42.)

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

III

MOTIVATION

To understand the motivation of James Ramsay, one must examine a number of facts and influences of his life. As a young man, Ramsay aspired towards the ministry. The early death of his father, however, prevented his pursuing the necessary education, and he served as a physician's apprentice. Circumstances occurred whereby he might study liberal arts, after which he studied surgery and pharmacy. Following his examination he entered the Royal Navy as assistant surgeon, and later became surgeon. This was to lead to his exposure to slave conditions and ultimately to his life of service for the slave community.⁸⁹

In 1759 while serving on a vessel commanded by Charles Middleton, Ramsay was the only surgeon of the fleet who volunteered to assist with an epidemic on a passing slaver. "The scene made a lasting impression on the deeply religious and humane James Ramsay, and kindled his undying enmity against the slave trade and slavery."⁹⁰ Three years later he was able to leave the Navy in order to pursue his long felt life calling. He took holy orders and returned to the West Indies (where he had been stationed in the Navy) to begin his ministry.⁹¹ A strong suggestion of his humanitarian motivation is seen in the text he proclaimed:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the
Lord hath annointed me to preach good tidings unto
the meek; He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted,

⁸⁹Shyllon, op. cit., pp. 1-2.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 3, quote p. 6.

⁹¹Ibid., pp. 4-5.

to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. 92

The combining of his humanitarianism and his sense of Christian obligation caused Ramsay to begin immediately working among the slaves. Shyllon observes that "he drew up some easy and plain discourses" for their instruction.⁹³ As indicated above he set aside specific times to teach them and to lead them in worship. Undoubtedly, this initially simple desire to serve as a Christian, as a minister, led to the experiences and interactions which would dominate his thinking and determine his future as an abolitionist:

. . . he had seen hell on earth, or rather hell in the sunshine, and he could not shrug off brutality, injustice, immorality, and oppression. He took by the throat the forces that made possible and wished to continue, man's greatest inhumanity to man, because he was certain that humanity and morality were on his side. 94

Years later the combined motives of Christian imperative and humanitarianism were accentuated by the European Magazine in its response to Ramsay's Essay: "Ramsay's motive for giving this Essay to the public is, of all others the most commendable, and the most becoming a christian Divine. -- It is humanity."⁹⁵

Christian humanitarianism explains the strong insistence on justice and equity throughout Ramsay's works. He challenged his readers and Parliament to treat all human beings alike. If the allowed principles sanctioned the slave trade, the same principles should be equally

⁹²Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18, cited in Shyllon, op. cit., p. 7.

⁹³Shyllon, op. cit., p. 7.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 117.

⁹⁵Cited by Shyllon, op. cit., p. 39.

applicable to situations involving nations other than Africa. He did not accept those principles, and in 1788 he stated his high priority of justice: "As a moral agent, as a member of the Christian community . . . no political right ought to be sustained, which is not founded on morality and justice."⁹⁶

While part of Ramsay's motivation came from his faith, it appears to stem from the overall nature of scripture and God rather than from a group of specific texts. Not considered an Evangelical, he tended to use the Bible mainly in reaction to what he would call the "misuse" by others, as can be seen in his refutation of Harris. He did feel that "the natural effect of Christianity . . . [would] favour personal as well as mental liberty"⁹⁷ as could be seen by the historical precedent of Christians' influence for manumission.⁹⁸ His main biblical guide was simply the golden rule,⁹⁹ which certainly is congruent with his high value of justice and equity. In this he is very close to Wesley, and Benezet who of course, were evangelicals.

One final aspect of Ramsay's motivation is his belief that he was called by Providence to serve this cause. This element is not as obvious in his writings as in those of Wilberforce, but it is reflected in his actions. His extensive efforts for abolition, in the context of

⁹⁶ Ramsay, Objectives, p. 11.

⁹⁷ Ramsay, Essay, pp. 30-31.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 30-31, 47; Ramsay, Examination, p. 24: ". . . wherever the gospel has prevailed, it has . . . abolished it [slavery]."

⁹⁹ Ramsay, Objections, pp. 11-12, Examination, p. 5.

his previous ministry to West Indian blacks indicates that all his service was a result of his call to the ministry. This is confirmed by the report of Ramsay's last moments:

In some of the last sentences which he uttered . . . he expressed great satisfaction at having been made an instrument, in the hand of his merciful Creator, in promoting his beneficent purposes towards an afflicted portion of his creatures. 100

Thus, Ramsay's motivation appears to have been a strong Christian humanitarianism. His innate concern for his fellow man was strengthened and given a channel by his faith and the principles of the Bible. Further impetus, especially during the time his character was so severely attacked, was afforded by his conviction that he had been appointed by Providence to be "an instrument" in this cause. It is interesting to realise that while Ramsay agreed with Harris that abuses in any form of commerce must be stopped,¹⁰¹ his own efforts, expressing his humanitarianism, were predominantly limited to working for the abolition of the slave trade, and Christianising and educating the slaves of the West Indies. Had Ramsay lived beyond his short fifty-four years (1789), one wonders what his further involvement with the cause, his emphasis after 1807, and his relationship among the other abolitionists would have been.

¹⁰⁰Shyllon, op. cit., p. 111, quoting The Diary, 22 July, 1789, and Gentleman's Magazine, 20 July, 1789, LIX, Pt. II p. 673.

¹⁰¹Ramsay, Examination, p. 6.

CHAPTER V

GRANVILLE SHARP

Without question, Granville Sharp was one of the most significant leaders in the struggle against slavery. Clarkson refers to him as the "father of the cause in England."¹ Davis indicates that the Somerset decision, which was Sharp's first legal battle related to slavery, was "looked upon as the opening act of the antislavery drama."² Undoubtedly, it was the work which Sharp did in the law courts, almost singlehandedly, that prevented slavery from taking root in England. Certainly he was a man whose life energies were given to causes, the most dominating of which was antislavery. He was a crucial figure, interacting and co-operating with other key leaders of the abolition movement, particularly Anthony Benezet and the members of the Abolition Committee.

Born in 1735, Granville was the grandson of Archbishop Sharp, and the son of the Archdeacon of Northumberland. As the twelfth of fourteen children, there was little of the family fortune left for his formal education, so he was 'apprenticed to a linen draper at the age of fifteen.³ The apprenticeship lasted seven years, following which he began working for the Ordnance Office at the Tower.⁴ He served there for twenty years until his resignation for conscience reasons, not wanting to supply arms against the Americans (1777).⁵

¹Prince Hoare, Memoirs of Granville Sharp, (London, 1820), p. 413. Hereafter referred to as "Memoirs". (Hoare is quoting Clarkson's History, Vol. I.)

²Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823, p. 377.

³Edward C. P. Lascelles, Granville Sharp and the Freedom of Slaves in England, (London, 1928), pp. 2-3.

⁴Ibid., pp. 3-6.

⁵Hoare, op. cit., pp. 123-4.

In 1765 Sharp had his first encounter with slavery. Over the next several years, it proved to be the first of a series of events which would enlist Sharp in the antislavery cause. At his physician brother's medical practice he chanced to meet Jonathan Strong, who was there to receive charity medical help for severe wounds inflicted by his master, David Lisle. Because of the disabilities which he had caused, Lisle had abandoned Strong. The Sharp brothers nursed Strong back to health and secured a job for him, as a free negro. Two years later, Lisle happened to see his slave, now healthy and robust, fit to be a profitable slave again. He promptly arranged to sell Strong, and had him secured in Poultry Compter whereupon Strong appealed to Granville for help. The result was that Sharp became involved and eventually defended Strong in court. In spite of having no legal experience, he won the case; the findings of his research for the case were published two years later (1769) as his first antislavery writing: A Representation of the Injustice and Dangerous Tendency of Tolerating Slavery . . . in England.⁶ In the months and years that followed the Strong case, Sharp became involved in other cases and finally secured the Mansfield ruling in 1772 which stated that English law did not permit slavery in England.⁷

In 1777 Sharp sent copies of his The Law of Retribution to the bench of bishops. Two years later he attempted to get the slave trade stopped "by getting the issue raised in a House of Commons Committee, appointed to examine . . . the British African trade."⁸

⁶ Ibid., pp. 33-37.

⁷ Ibid., p. 91; Lascelles, op. cit., p. 34. (The Somerset Case)

⁸ Anstey, The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition 1760-1810, (London, 1975), pp. 245-6. Anstey indicates that Sharp had been cultivating his relationships with the bishops. He used these contacts when trying to influence the House Committee.

Sharp not only fought against slavery in England, but went on to influence greatly the abolition of the Slave Trade, and slavery itself. He was instrumental in the colonization of Sierra Leone. His interests however, were much wider; for example, he helped in the establishment of the Episcopacy in America. The scope of his contribution to society was acknowledged when three American institutions conferred on him honorary doctoral degrees.⁹ Sharp lived to see the abolition of the slave trade and died in 1813, at the age of 78.¹⁰

I

ATTITUDE TOWARD SLAVERY

A diligent perusal of Sharp's writings reveals that he opposed the institution of slavery more thoroughly and from more perspectives than any of the men thus far studied; it is safe to say more than any of his fellow abolitionists. He called slavery ". . . the most abominable oppression of all others, and, consequently, the most hateful in the sight of God."¹¹ Davis indicates that his view of slavery was "a religious version of George Wallace's radical position that every slave had an immediate right to be declared free."¹² It was in Sharp's nature to be comprehensive; during his apprentice years he learned both Greek and Hebrew for theological debate. Further, upon discovering that his linen-drapery master, Willoughby, had rights to a peerage, he undertook the task, did the necessary research and won the peerage for Willoughby.¹³

⁹Hoare, op. cit., pp. 253-4; College of Providence, Rhode Island, 1786, Doctor of Laws; University of Cambridge, Massachusetts; University of Williamsburg, Virginia.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 469, 471.

¹¹Ibid., p. 184, quoting Sharp's letter to the Archbishop of York, 30 July, 1772.

¹²Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, p. 397.

¹³Lascelles, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

When it came to slavery, he left no stone unturned. He believed that "natural liberty" was "that blessing to which all mankind have an undoubted right,"¹⁴ and he would work toward the reality of all men experiencing that right. The perspectives from which he attacked slavery include the English law and Constitution, principles of universal, or higher law, Biblical principles, Christianity, humanity and economics.

As stated above, Sharp's initial work against slavery came while he was defending Jonathan Strong. When his legal counsel suggested that the laws and the opinion of Chief Justice Mansfield were not on his side, Sharp decided to develop his own counsel by studying law himself. From that point Sharp's whole plan was to weaken the York and Talbot ruling of 1729 (that slaves were not freed just by being brought into England, or by being baptised)¹⁵ by *harking* back to Chief Justice Holt's ruling that slavery could not exist in England.¹⁶ Sharp maintained that ". . . slavery is an innovation in England, contrary to the spirit and intention of our present laws and constitution."¹⁷

¹⁴Granville Sharp, A Representation of the Injustice and Dangerous Tendency of Tolerating Slavery . . . in England, (London, 1769), p. 38. (Hereafter referred to as "Representation"). It is interesting that Sharp, an Evangelical, subscribed to natural law. However, the present study reveals that many Evangelicals applied the natural law argument to the question of slavery but not necessarily to other issues.

¹⁵Hoare, op. cit., p. 36.

¹⁶The entire Representation is a legal framework for outlawing slavery in England. The first part refutes the York and Talbot ruling in defense of Holt, that as soon as a negro comes to England he becomes free. The second part answers objections to this premise. Part three relates advantages and disadvantages of tolerating slavery in England and part four maintains the obsolescence of ancient villeinage (legally), asserting that even if it were admissible it is different from contemporary slavery and would not justify it (contemporary slavery). (Holt's ruling was in 1732, according to Sharp's Representation, p. 6.)

¹⁷Sharp, Representation, p. 42.

He based his case on the English tradition of villeinage, the technical relationship of monarch to subjects, and the question of reciprocity of English to colonial law, each of which shall be dealt with in the following section. His efforts succeeded, and ". . . in the popular view, Sharp's judicial victory proved that slavery violated the fundamental law of England," which he saw as the "true model of liberty."¹⁸

Sharp however, was not satisfied to approach the issue only from the perspective of the laws of England. There was a higher principle, a more significant source: "All laws ought to be founded on the principle of 'doing as one would be done by:' and indeed this principle seems to be the very basis of the English constitution" ¹⁹ For Sharp, English law could be trusted because it was based on a higher law. In his 1776 tract, The Law of Liberty, he equates the 'law of liberty' with the second commandment, to love one's neighbour as one's self. The application of this law to slavery was readily apparent. (Ramsay and Wesley likewise drew on this application.)

As far as the New Testament admonition to obey the rulers of the land (Romans, chapter 13), Sharp addressed the issue thoroughly in his Law of Passive Obedience, (1776). He was aware that this passage was "frequently cited by the advocates for arbitrary power, in order to justify their false notions concerning the necessity of absolute

¹⁸ Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, p. 401. Davis continues: "In some respects Sharp himself regarded the new American Constitution as a purified version of the original British model. But this made him 'the more sincerely grieved,' as he wrote Benjamin Franklin, 'to see the new Federal Consitution stained by the insertion of two most exceptionable clauses.'" These were the twenty year provision for continuation of the slave trade, and the fugitive slave clause.

¹⁹ Sharp, Representation, p. 103.

submission and entire passive obedience!"²⁰ But Sharp interpreted Romans 13 to mean that a ruler must be obeyed as long as he upholds law and justice, regardless of his character. When he no longer upholds justice he must be contested.²¹ Under those circumstances Sharp rejected "the dangerous doctrine of unlimited passive obedience,"²² maintaining that it was the responsibility of Christians to change government where it did not enforce justice, and certainly slavery was a prime example. At this point one could perceive Sharp to be something of a revolutionary, and yet his method of changing government would be strictly through the

²⁰Sharp, Law of Passive Obedience, (London, 1776), p. 68. (Hereafter referred to as "Passive Obedience").

²¹Ibid., pp. 70-71. Sharp supported this contention by citing both Jesus and Paul of the New Testament. Paul accused the high priest Ananias of not being worthy of his office; Jesus confronted the high priest and was struck by the attending officer, but not protected by the high priest. (Passive Obedience, pp. 41-66). Sharp went on to say that when a ruler was guilty of "perverting the laws, and of abusing the delegated power, with which he is entrusted . . . by acts of violence and injustice, [he] is so far from being 'the minister of God,' that he is manifestly 'the minister of the devil;'. . . ." (Passive Obedience, pp. 70-71.) Peter and John followed the same principle when they were commanded not to continue teaching and preaching, saying that it is more important to obey God than those who were commanding them (Passive Obedience, pp. 81-82). "All men, therefore . . . are REQUIRED to vindicate the cause of truth, justice, and righteousness, whenever they have a favourable opportunity of doing so; they ARE REQUIRED, I say, because they ARE ENABLED by their NATURAL KNOWLEDGE of GOOD and EVIL to discern and judge concerning the fitness or unfitness of human actions, and of the justice or injustice of all measures" "He that denies this is ignorant of the true dignity of human nature" (Passive Obedience, p. 89.) Sharp is the first to voice these sentiments after the Radical Puritans, but 100 years later.

²²Ibid., pp. 74-75. Cf. Chapters VII (Wesley), p. 206; VIII, pp. 249-50. ("Calm Address to American Colonies", and "Observations on Liberty".)

legal processes. Certainly he saw the support of slavery as antithetical to the principles of Christianity and he would not tolerate defending such an abominable institution on the basis of obedience to rulers, because "no power on earth has legal authority to give sanction to such enormities."²³ And if the Legislature should adopt "the most horrid and diabolical of the West Indian Laws"²⁴ right and wrong would still not change places because:

'No Legislature on Earth, which is the supreme power in every Civil Society, can alter the Nature of things, or make that to be lawful, which is contrary to the Law of God, the supreme Legislator and Governor of the World.' Mischief may be framed, and established by a Law, but if it be, it is mischief still, as much so as it was before it was established 25

Thus, all law in principle can be traced back to scripture, and governmental authority for enforcing that kind of law is truly God given. It followed naturally for Sharp that any ruling which opposed Biblical principles, as did those condoning slavery, could not be classified as law, were not in harmony with justice and must be changed. Davis concurs with this view of Sharp, saying that he "expressed confidence that the English government had not intentionally allowed the introduction

²³Hoare, op. cit., p. 423, quoting Sharp's journal.

²⁴Sharp, An Appendix to the Representation against Slavery, (London, 1772), p. 25. (Hereafter referred to as "Representation, Appendix").

²⁵Ibid., pp. 25-26. This statement seems to be taken directly from Benezet: Some Historical Account, (1771) pp. 131-2:

"If it be alleged, that the legislature hath encouraged and still does encourage this trade, it is answered, that no legislature on earth can alter the nature of things, so as to make that to be right which is contrary to the law of God" p. 132: "Injustice may be methodized and established by law, but still it will be injustice as much as it was before, though its being so established, may render men more insensible of the guilt, and more bold and secure in the perpetration of it"

This statement appears in Sharp's work the year following Benezet's publication of Some Historical Account. It was also used by Wesley in 1774. See Chapter VII, p. 204.

of slavery in the colonies; the evil had simply arisen from 'want of a first attention to the first principles of law and religion.'"²⁶ Sharp worked hard to refocus that attention, and succeeded in 1772 (Somerset case) when the courts said he was correct.²⁷

Following his work with Strong, resulting in the published form of his Representation, Sharp began a more thorough research of the Old Testament in regard to slavery.²⁸ His findings would reveal that "the whole tenour of the Scriptures teaches us, that Slavery was ever detestable in the sight of God" ²⁹ As will be dealt with below, his thorough use of the Bible causes him to stand apart from other eighteenth century abolitionists. The results of his study (Old and New Testaments) were published in 1776-77 as a series of five tracts (totaling 959 pages).³⁰ His argument from scripture was thorough, logical and undoubtedly the most complete of the eighteenth century:

If we carefully examine the Scriptures we shall find, that slavery and oppression were ever abominable in the sight of God; for though the Jews were permitted by the law of Moses (on account of the hardness of their hearts) to keep slaves, as I have remarked in my answer to the Reverend Mr. Thompson on this subject . . . yet there was no inherent right of service to be implied from this permission, because whenever the slave could escape he was esteemed free; and it was absolutely

²⁶ Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, p. 403.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 376.

²⁸ Lascelles, op. cit., p. 50.

²⁹ Sharp, The Law of Retribution, (London, 1776), p. 302. (Hereafter referred to as "Retribution".)

³⁰ The Just Limitation of Slavery in the Laws of God; The Law of Passive Obedience; The Law of Liberty; The Law of Retribution (these four published in 1776); and The Law of Nature and Principles of Action in Man (1777). For a summary of these tracts, see Appendix I.

unlawful for any man (who believed the word of God) to deliver him up again to his master (see Deut. xxiii. 15, 16.) 31

. . . Slavery is absolutely inconsistent with Christianity, because we cannot say of any Slave-holder, that he doth not to another, what he would not have done to himself. 32

Thus, on the basis of scripture Sharp consistently opposed the institution of slavery. A concomitant perspective was that the Christian religion in general also opposed slavery, which was "destructive of morality and charity, and . . . gives . . . a power to deprive . . . slaves of instruction and spiritual improvement, by continually oppressing them with labour."³³ Since it was so wrong, there was no denying the guilt of those involved:

. . . every man, who endeavours to palliate and screen such oppression is undoubtedly a partaker of the guilt. The slaveholder deceives himself if he thinks he can really be a Christian, and yet hold such property. Can he be said to love his neighbour as himself? 34

Certainly not, unless, of course, as Montesquieu pretends in his satire, the negroes are not really men.³⁵

Scripture and Christianity aside, Sharp opposed slavery also on purely humanitarian grounds, stating that to allow it is a "toleration of

³¹Sharp, The Just Limitation of Slavery in the Laws of God, (London, 1776), p. 49. (Hereafter referred to as "Just Limitation".)

³²Sharp, The Law of Liberty, (London, 1776), p. 33. (Hereafter referred to as "Liberty".)

³³Sharp, Representation, p. 162.

³⁴Sharp, Just Limitation, pp. 38-39.

³⁵On p. 15 of Representation Sharp adds a footnote of the familiar Montesquieu satire: "'It is impossible for us to suppose that these people are men; because if we should suppose them to be men, one would begin to believe that we ourselves are not Christians.' A very severe (and alas! but too just) satire against Slaveholders." Sharp also cites the other aspects of Montesquieu's argument against slavery, Representation, pp. 5, 10, 79, 83.

inhumanity" ³⁶ He was grateful for "the learned Dr. Beattie" who had "fully refuted . . . Aristotle's futile attempt to justify slavery" ³⁷ Throughout his Representation, is seen his view of the inherent humanity and worth of the negro, and thus the humanitarian responsibility of dealing justly with one's fellow human beings. In a passage that hints toward the reciprocal effect of bondage, the effect that Clarkson asserts twenty-four years later (1823), Sharp points out:

For mankind in general, howsoever religious they may esteem themselves, are not so perfect as to be safely intrusted with absolute power. Avarice, choler, lust, revenge, caprice, and all other human infirmities, according to the different dispositions of men, will too frequently enslave the master himself, so as to render him intirely unfit to be entrusted with absolute power over others. 38

In addition, the economics of owning a slave (being responsible for his care and needs), made slavery less profitable than simply paying wages to free labourers. ³⁹ This was even more unreasonable in England when "so many of our own free fellowsubjects want bread." ⁴⁰ While Sharp mentioned the economic issue of slavery, he emphasised it less than the other abolitionists, particularly, Ramsay.

Sharp was deeply opposed to the institution of slavery. His opposition was based on his well thought out perspectives of English law in general, scripture and the Christian religion, and principles of humanity and economics. He saw slavery as more than the sins of individuals;

³⁶ Sharp, Representation, p. 79.

³⁷ Sharp, Just Limitation, p. 27.

³⁸ Sharp, Representation, pp. 162-3. See Chapter III, (Clarkson), pp. 58-9. his Condition of Slaves, p. 5. Also, cf. Chapter VIII (Wesley's Distinctive Doctrines) pp. 250-51.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 76-78.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 75.

it was a collective evil. Thus God's vengeance would not be limited to those directly involved, but as in the case of Achan of the Old Testament, all would be guilty by association:⁴¹

The horrible Guilt therefore, which is incurred by Slave-dealing and Slave-holding, is no longer confined to the few hardened Individuals, that are immediately concerned in those baneful Practices, but alas! the WHOLE BRITISH EMPIRE is involved!

. . . National GUILT must inevitably draw down from God some tremendous National Punishment⁴²

This view explains Sharp's strategy which was to alter the social structure, specifically the legal system, and thereby change individual behaviour.

While the attitudes about slavery as an institution seemed to vary or develop over time with some abolitionists (particularly Ramsay and Newton), Sharp's attitude was always one of strong opposition. Many people of the eighteenth century were outraged by the atrocities of slavery yet would have been content with an ameliorated system, but to Sharp, "slavery under any conditions was opposed to all principles of justice, it mattered little whether acts of cruelty in the plantations were common or rare."⁴³ The only facet of his campaign which developed, was his desired area of influence. Initially, he was concerned about England only. What America did was irrelevant to him, but he would exert every effort to prevent slavery from taking root in England: "It is not my business at present to examine how far a toleration of slavery may be necessary or justifiable in the West Indies. 'Tis sufficient for my

⁴¹Sharp, Liberty, pp. 46-7.

⁴²Ibid., p. 49.

⁴³Lascelles, op. cit., p. 56.

purpose, that it is not so here."⁴⁴ This was written in 1769, but by 1776 his views had changed. Slavery was such an evil that it must not only be prevented in England, it must be wiped off the face of the earth, starting with the colonies:

But it is not enough; that the Laws of England exclude Slavery merely from this island, whilst the grand Enemy of mankind triumphs in a toleration, throughout our Colonies, of the most monstrous oppression to which human nature can be subjected! 45

So opposed to slavery was he that he had doubts about those who did not attack the institution of slavery aggressively. As Lascelles writes:

Granville's view of Fox was affected by his misgivings about any one who failed to denounce slavery itself. 'I believe with you', he wrote to Capel Lofft, 'that the late Mr. Fox was very earnest and sincere in his endeavours to promote the abolition of the Slave-Trade, but neither he nor any other person in Parliament, has ever yet sufficiently urged the indispensable necessity of abolishing the abominable source of that cruel trade - the Toleration of Slavery. 46

Like Clarkson, Sharp was not so involved in the world of ideals that he forgot the practical. Both men thought about the difficulties involved in freeing those who had only known a life of dependence, and who were not equipped vocationally or educationally to cope in a free world. Sharp first confronted the problem of free but jobless blacks in London, after his English antislavery success. The result of his efforts to alleviate the problem was the Sierra Leone experiment. Although its early history had only checkered successes, eventually the problems were resolved and it became increasingly effective. The

⁴⁴Sharp, Representation, pp. 80-81.

⁴⁵Sharp, Just Limitation, p. 2.

⁴⁶Lascelles, op. cit., p. 80.

point here is that Sharp was not only an idealist academically arguing for a concept of freedom. He was also a practical man who would place his money and his energy in the task of applying the ideals to real life.

By the same token, he considered thoroughly the difficulties which would be encountered when West Indian blacks were freed. Although emancipation did not occur until more than twenty years after his death, already in 1776 he had worked out a system of transition, from slavery to a free peasantry. The system involved establishing a specific value for each slave, who could then use his free days to work for his master for wages, thus earning money and eventually purchasing his whole freedom. The process would be gradual, buying one day (of each working week) at a time, so that by the time the slave was free, the master would be happy, as he had been paid the value of the slave; the slave would be adjusted to freedom and to being a free labourer, since he had been acclimated gradually. Best of all, the work force would remain constant, as the negroes would probably continue working on the estates, only as paid labourers instead of slaves. Incentive would occur through free enterprise motivation, both for purchasing freedom and for continuing work thereafter.⁴⁷ In this plan, Sharp seems to have covered all angles, the rights of the owners, the motivation of the slaves and the care of the less capable.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Sharp, Just Limitation, Appendix, pp. 58, 60. Found also in Hoare, op. cit., appendix VII., p. xvi, called the "Spanish Regulations", a plan for gradual emancipation.

⁴⁸ Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, p. 377 makes the point that at the time of the Somerset case, slavery was seen as "'Un-British'" and therefore "A denunciation of colonial slavery . . . implied no taste for a freer or more equal society." This latter thought is continued on p. 382 in regard to Clarkson and Sharp: "According to Thomas Clarkson, there was nothing inequitable about slavery when considered merely as a form of labour. Any state, for example, might legitimately use convicts to clear rivers, repair roads, or work in mines. Granville Sharp suggested that 'Negroes that are not capable of managing and shifting for themselves, nor are fit to be trusted, all at once,

Finally, the greatest evidence for the premise that Sharp was always opposed to the institution of slavery, and not just the abuses, comes from his interaction with the Abolition Committee. As mentioned in Chapter III (Clarkson p. 55, note 2) the Committee were opposed to both slavery and the slave trade, but decided for reasons of expediency to attack only the trade. They felt that when the trade fell, the way would be paved for their other goal, the ending of the institution. The significant point here is that while Sharp was aware of this reasoning, he did not concur. He desired the committee to move ahead in two directions attacking both the trade and the institution. At the time of decision, he remained a minority of one supporting this view:

Of ten persons who were present, Granville stood singly for including the abolition of slavery in the title of the Society. 'As slavery,' he asserted, 'was as much a

(Footnote 48 continued from page 119)

with liberty, might be delivered over to the care and protection of a County Committee (in order to avoid the baneful effects of private property in Men).' The committee could then hire out such servants, 'the Hire to be paid (also in produce) towards the discharge of the Registered Debt for each Man's original price.' Nor did Sharp object to the purchase of slaves by a corporate entity, such as an African colonizing company, so long as the purchase price was considered a 'mere pecuniary debt' that the slave could redeem by working for the company."

Issue can be taken with Davis' conclusion on a number of counts. To deduce that Sharp's objective was not equity and freedom is to miss both the context of the eighteenth century, in which the institution of slavery was generally accepted but not by Sharp and Clarkson, and the fact that the slave labour Sharp advocated was temporary, and a means of effecting emancipation with the least amount of social upheaval. Sharp's own words indicate that the temporary system was for those slaves who were not ready to receive liberty "all at once." It is a mistake to confuse Sharp's idea of emancipation with a reticence toward freedom and equity. His later work of Parliamentary reform, in which he worked for representation of persons, not property, suggests his valuing of equity.

Against the backdrop of his many statements against slavery, Sharp's idea of temporary slave labour must be seen as a reflection of his system of emancipation, not his attitude toward slavery.

crime against the Divine laws as the Slave Trade,
it became the Committee to exert themselves equally
against the continuance of both. 49

It is conceivable that the difference of opinion on this point may have caused a bit of coolness on Sharp's part. He did serve as chairman of the Committee, but it was less of a working role than having the influence of his name attached to their workings. Clarkson mentions that the reason for this refusal to take the chair visibly was Sharp's humility.⁵⁰ Lascelles however, takes issue with this reasoning when he suggests that "the reason for this aloofness was . . . an uneasy doubt whether he ought to be with them at all,"⁵¹ due to the above mentioned difference of opinion. Regardless, the point being made is that even when he stood alone, in the midst of fellow abolitionists, Sharp was for the ending of the institution. He could assert:

. . . I am bound in reason and common justice to mankind to declare further, that many years (at least 20 years) before the Society was formed, I thought (and I ever shall think) it to be my duty to expose the monstrous impiety and cruelty (for 'Impious and Cruel' are the legal epithets for such iniquity) not only of the Slave-Trade, but of Slavery itself in whatever form it is favoured, and likewise to assert that no authority on earth can ever render such enormous iniquity legal 52

In 1790, he referred in his diary to the Committee for the abolition

⁴⁹Hoare, op. cit., p. 415, citing Clarkson's History (1808).

⁵⁰Anstey, (op. cit., pp. 246-47) indicates that the reason was lack of time due to being already overcommitted to spending time in the cause.

⁵¹Lascelles, op. cit., p. 70. Lascelles continues: "This letter to his brother /wherein Sharp explains his titular leadership of the Committee/ is surprisingly unlike Granville. That the champion of Jonathan Strong should leave the struggle to others . . . should find it 'impossible to undertake any additional trouble' in the cause of abolition, is hardly credible." (p. 70)

⁵²Hoare, op. cit., p. 428, quoting Sharp's letter to Lord Bishop of London, January, 1795. Also in Lascelles, op. cit., pp. 71-72.

of "slavery."⁵³ In 1807 he stated that "he had earlier made a declaration to the group, stating that whenever he acted with them [the Committee] his own opposition would be aimed not merely at the slave trade but at toleration of slavery itself."⁵⁴

From his introduction to the cause in 1767, throughout all his endeavours, Granville Sharp was unequivocally opposed not only to the slave trade, the abuses and atrocities associated with the system, but to the institution of slavery itself.

II

APPEAL TO PRINCIPLES OF LAW AND SCRIPTURE⁵⁵

Sharp laboured tirelessly and prodigiously for the cause from the age of thirty-two until his death forty-six years later. His initial contests were legal battles to be fought in the courts of law. His early arguments were slanted towards applying the true law (laws of England, and the higher law) to the question of slavery. Following the Somerset victory of 1772, he moved from the legal context (addressing minds accustomed to dealing in matters of law) to the spreading of Biblical principles related to slavery. His audience increased to the citizenry of both England and the new world.

The hallmark of Sharp's appeal is his exacting use of logic. Certainly his early successes can be attributed to his pinpoint mental accuracy and meticulous logic. He would use this ability, although he

⁵³ Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, p. 408.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ In this section Sharp is quoted extensively in order to represent accurately the development of his argument. This is thought to be particularly necessary in his dealing with scripture because Sharp's treatment is the most comprehensive from the eighteenth through the mid-nineteenth century.

had difficulty understanding why such a battle even needed to be waged in a Christian society. In his first published writing he expressed this astonishment:

An attempt to prove the dangerous tendency, injustice and disgrace of tolerating Slavery amongst Englishmen, would in any former age have been esteemed as superfluous and ridiculous, as if a man should undertake in a formal manner, to prove that darkness is not light. 56

Sharp's most unique and effective tool (at least in the early years of his work) was what we shall term "legal logic." In 1767, finding himself in the law courts with Jonathan Strong, but without professional legal counsel to defend his case, Sharp turned to the law books himself. Intuitively he felt that the laws of England could not permit the kind of action he was fighting, but it remained for him to demonstrate that from existing laws. The result of his efforts was a kind of legal logic which established in the courts of law that slavery would not be permitted in England. In essence Sharp succeeded in "converting antislavery into a defense of traditional authority," thus driving "a wedge between the defense of slavery and the defense of traditional privilege."⁵⁷

The findings of Sharp's research (in the case associated with Strong) were put into a memorandum and later published (1769) as his Representation of the Injustice and Dangerous Tendency of Tolerating Slavery . . . in England. The work is an appeal to the 1732 legal ruling of Chief Justice Holt that "'as soon as a Negro comes into England, he becomes free: one may be a villain in England, but not a slave.'"⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Sharp, Representation, p. 105.

⁵⁷ Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, pp. 375-6.

⁵⁸ Sharp, Representation, p. 6.

Realising that the proponents of slavery would simply re-name it "villeinage," Sharp brought the 1732 ruling and its terms up to date; villeinage in England had simply died out, and by the legal terms which defined it, it could no longer exist. It was ". . . extinct in law, as well as in itself, for want of succession" ⁵⁹ Sharp pointed out that the system of villeinage was based on a relationship to the land, and depended on hereditary succession. Therefore:

. . . it would be very impolitic, as well as unjust, to permit a foreign institution, like the West Indian Slavery, to revive or assume, like a lawful heir, the ancient rights of villeinage, when it is apparent, that such a claimant has no just title to succeed.

The West Indian Slavery sprung from a very different source, and therefore heredity right by descent is excluded 60

Earlier in his Representation (pp. 107ff.), Sharp had made a strong case that villeinage was dissolved in the twelfth year of the reign of Charles II. ⁶¹ Therefore, a slave:

. . . on his coming to England, must be absolutely free, and not subject to any "claims whatsoever of perpetual service," on account of his former Slavery, as some have imagined: because the doctrine of "a perpetual service due to the master," is in effect, a vassalage, and, as such, is inconsistent with the present spirit of our laws. 62

Sharp's "legal logic" was also specifically applied to the relationship and obligations of subjects to the King, and vice versa. Any person

⁵⁹ Sharp, Representation, p. 132.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 132-3.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 124: "the advocates for Slavery cannot avail themselves of these statutes; because Villinage (being originally a tenure of land) 'was taken away and discharged' by authority of Parliament in the 12 year of Charles II."

⁶² Ibid., p. 158.

resident in England must be considered a subject of the King, and obligated to obey him. By the same token, that subject could not be owned by someone other than the King, and was entitled to the King's protection:

. . . every man, woman, or child, "that now is, or hereafter shall be an inhabitant or resident of this kingdom of England . . ." is in some respect or other the King's subject; and, as such, is absolutely secure in his or her personal liberty, by virtue of a Statute, 31, Car. 11, ch. ii. and particularly, by the xiith Section of the same 63

The only way to side-step this protection, and still maintain obedience to the King was to re-classify those in question:

The Negro must be divested of his humanity, and rendered incapable of the King's protection, before such an action [being the property of men] can lawfully take place. 64

But because human nature cannot be altered,

. . . every Negro Slave, being undoubtedly either man, woman, or child; he or she immediately upon their arrival in England, becomes the King's property in the relative sense before-mentioned, and cannot, therefore be "out of the King's protection." 65

Thus it must appear, that the plea of private property in a Negro, as in a horse or a dog, is very insufficient and defective.

For they cannot be justified, unless they shall be able to prove, that a Negro Slave is neither man, woman nor child 66

⁶³Sharp, Representation, p. 23 (also, pp. 154-5). The initial idea for this argument probably came to Sharp from Wallace by way of Benezet. In Benezet's A Caution to Great Britain and her Colonies (pp. 29-30) he quotes Wallace: "Government was instituted for the good of mankind; kings, princes, governors, are not proprietors of those who are subject to their authority; they have not a right to make them miserable. On the contrary, their authority is vested in them, that they may, by the just exercise of it, promote the happiness of their people." The same position is taken in Benezet's A Short Account . . . of Africa (p. 31) Wesley also took this position on the responsibility of the King to his subjects.

⁶⁴Sharp, Representation, pp. 15-16.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 19.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 15.

It is conceivable that Sharp's position initiated the West Indian lobby's subsequent production of literature asserting that negroes are not fully human, or at least of the same species as white men (for example, the writings of Edward Long and Samuel Estwick).

Sharp was also confident that the spirit of English law was opposed to slavery and pressed the point that although present laws (to his day) had been written before slavery had become an issue, they included the general principles which must be applied to any new situation, in this case, slavery:

Neither at common law can the latter [private property in men] be recoverable, for Slavery being an innovation entirely foreign to the spirit and intention of the present laws, as is before remarked, there is no law to justify proceedings, nor sufficient precedents to authorize judgment.

Nay, it is an innovation of such an unwarrantable and dangerous nature, that besides the gross infringement of the common and natural rights of mankind, it is plainly contrary to the laws and constitution of this kingdom; for I have shewn . . . that no laws whatsoever countenance it, and . . . that several in the clearest though general terms render it actionable. 67

To the argument that slave laws were valid in the West Indies, and a man's property should remain intact in England, Sharp replied:

The laws of England admit no such right [slavery] and therefore cannot enforce it, and with respect to the plantation laws, I hope no one will presume to insinuate that their influence can extend in the least degree to the mother country, howsoever they may have been confirmed for the use of the colonies 68

. . . when the Negro Slave is once removed to England, he cannot in the least be affected by any other laws than those of England 69

The superiority of English law over that of the colonies was apparent to Sharp as he described the inequities of colonial law: dismemberment

⁶⁷ Sharp, Representation, pp. 40-41.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 160.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 161.

for disobedient slaves, but only a fifteen pound fine for the wanton murder of a slave.⁷⁰ Sharp pleaded against such laws:

As Englishmen, we strenuously contend for this absolute and immutable necessity of trials by juries: but is not the spirit and equity of this old English doctrine entirely lost, if we partially confine that justice to ourselves alone, when we have it in our power to extend it to others? The natural right of all mankind must principally justify our insisting upon this necessary privilege in favour of ourselves in particular; and therefore if we do not allow, that the judgment of an impartial jury is indispensably necessary in all cases whatsoever, wherein the life of a man is depending, we certainly undermine the equitable force and reason of those laws, by which we ourselves are protected, and consequently are unworthy to be esteemed either Christians or Englishmen. 71

English law was firm and just. It was equitable to all men because ". . . men are rendered obnoxious to the laws, by their offenses, and not by the particular denomination of their rank, order, parentage, colour or country" ⁷² But even if, for the sake of argument, this were not true, and men could be considered property to be owned, they would still have an estimable value. On the other hand, a man's body must always be considered his own property but of inestimable value. Thus, the law would favour the owner of property of inestimable worth over the owner of specifically valued property. ⁷³

Years later, in defending John Hylas (whose wife had been sold and transported away from him) Sharp's logic caught the court in its own contradiction:

The poor man, indeed, was asked in court, whether he would have his wife, or damages? He replied, he desired to have his wife.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 67.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 71.

⁷²Ibid., p. 36.

⁷³Sharp, Representation, Appendix, pp. 6-8.

But why this cruel alternative? If he had a right to his wife, which cannot be denied, he most certainly had a right to damages also, in consideration of the violent and unpardonable outrage committed against himself in the person of his wife, for which no pecuniary allowance whatsoever can really make him amends: at least I should think so, was the case my own. 74

Sharp's sense for the logic, soundness and fairness of the law came from his conviction that English law was based finally on a higher law, as found in scripture. Where legal authority was in question, "the inferior law must give place to the Superior."⁷⁵ Thus there was for Sharp, an integral relationship between law and scripture. Logic applied to both could untangle misunderstandings and misinterpretations which led to the support of slavery.

As he had scrutinized English law to find its application to the question of slavery, he would also scrutinize scripture and learn what deductions could be made. Although Sharp had referred to scripture in his Representation, it was after his work on the Strong case that he began to work intensely on a biblical base for antislavery. Davis maintains that Sharp was unique in his use of scripture: "Despite the predominantly religious motivation of British Quakers and Evangelicals, the abolitionists, with few exceptions like Granville Sharp, made little use of Scriptural

⁷⁴Hoare, op. cit., appendix II, p. v. (Sharp's report)

⁷⁵Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, p. 397. This meant that a man could not be punished for breaking a civil law in order to keep a scriptural law. Sharp referred to Deuteronomy 23:15 "Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee." Thus, according to Sharp: "no Man can lawfully be prosecuted for protecting a Negro, OR ANY OTHER Slave whatever, that has 'escaped from his Master,' because that would be punishing a Man for doing his indispensible Duty, according to the Laws of God." (quoted in Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, p. 397.)

argument."⁷⁶ One reason for this could well be that the contemporary approach to the Bible made substantial use of isolated passages, a method well suited to a defence of slavery. However, in 1776 Sharp made very significant use of scripture, publishing nearly a thousand pages of work in which he applied scripture to the question of slavery.⁷⁷

Lascelles describes the effort:

The results, which appear in his tracts on slavery, were remarkable. He [Sharp] was satisfied that slave-owning had been sanctioned in the case of the Jews, but the sanction had been confined to the "particularly wicked nations", who had the misfortune to occupy the land of Canaan before the Jewish invasion. Most of the disasters, or "national judgments", which afflicted the Jews were due to their exceeding the limit of their sanctions as slave-owners. Indeed, many of the more striking calamities of the Old Testament might be attributed, in Granville's view, to God's vengeance against slave-owners. 78

While Sharp's investigations into English law produced a kind of "legal logic," his deductions from his Biblical researches could be termed a "scriptural logic." He looked discerningly at the scriptures, seeing specific passages in light of the whole Bible, and looking beyond commands and prohibitions to the circumstances surrounding, and the principles involved. Certainly in this Sharp stepped beyond the hermeneutic of his day which made every passage equal and thus fostered a proof-text approach. An example of his interpretation can be seen in his response to the S.P.G. missionary, Thomas Thompson, wherein Sharp maintains that God's allowing Old Testament Jews to practise slavery

⁷⁶ Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, p. 525.

⁷⁷ Sharp's four tracts of 1776 include: Just Limitation, Passive Obedience, Law of Liberty, and Law of Retribution, and all examine the issue of slavery in the light of scripture, both Old and New Testaments. See Appendix I.

⁷⁸ Lascelles, op. cit., p. 50.

is an example of his "forbearance", not his plan.⁷⁹ Indeed, Sharp's

⁷⁹ Granville Sharp, Some Remarks on a Late Attempt to Vindicate the Slave Trade By The Laws of God (quoted in full in Hoare, op. cit., Appendix, ix.) Hereafter referred to as "Some Remarks". "A Reverend Author, Mr. Thomas Thompson, M.A., has lately attempted to prove that 'the African Trade for Negro slaves is consistent with the principles of humanity and revealed religion.'"

From Leviticus xxv, 39-46, the Rev. Mr. Thompson draws his principal conclusion -- viz 'that the buying and selling of Slaves is not contrary to the laws of nature; for' (says he) 'the Jewish constitutions were strictly therewith consistent in all points; and these are, in certain cases, the rule by which is determined, by learned lawyers and casuists, what is or is not contrary to nature.' But these premises are not true; for the Jewish constitutions were not strictly consistent with the laws of nature in all points, as Mr. Thompson supposes, and consequently his principal conclusion thereupon is erroneous. Many things were formerly tolerated among the Israelites, merely through the mercy and forbearance of God" (quoted in Hoare, op. cit., pp. xxi-xxii)

Some Remarks was Sharp's response to Thomas Thompson's attempt to support the slave trade from scripture. Thompson was a missionary (to displaced British Anglicans) for the S.P.G. The sequence of events:

1767 (April 26) Benezet wrote the S.P.G. regarding slavery, a gentle protest.

1768 (February 3) Dr. Daniel Burton, secretary for the Society responded to Benezet, noting that slavery per se was not contrary to the Bible. Following this, Benezet requested Sharp's defence, but Sharp refused to take on the S.P.G. publicly, having too much regard for them.

1772 Thomas Thompson published The African Trade for Negro Slaves Shewn to be Consistent with Principles of Humanity and of Revealed Religion (Canterbury, 1772).

Following this, Sharp did respond, publishing Some Remarks.

Benezet's letter and Burton's response can be found in George S. Brookes, Friend Anthony Benezet, pp. 272-3, 417-18.

A letter from Sharp to the Archbishop of Canterbury, 1 August, 1786 gives his overall perspective on the matter. Sharp mentions that at the last S.P.G. meeting, he "could scarce refrain from declaring my mind about it, but thought it might be improper to interfere" "The answer of the Society, signed by Dr [Burton] many years ago, gave me great concern. Mr. Benezet himself sent me a copy of it from Philadelphia, and earnestly entreated my assistance to answer it. I had too much veneration for the Society to permit their opinion to be called publicly in question: but I fully answered their missionary, the Rev. Mr. Thomas Thompson, who had attempted publicly to vindicate the African Slave Trade; and sent my answer to Mr. Benezet in MS., which was printed in America by the Quakers.

At every opportunity of leisure afterwards, I applied myself closely to the Scriptures, to search for any particular texts which might seem to afford some excuse for Dr. ----'s contemptuous answer to Mr. Benezet. The result of the examination (which was careful and severe) appeared about ten years ago in several tracts-- 'The Law of Liberty;' and 'The Law of Retribution.' The principal object of my writing was to remove the stigma thrown on our Holy Religion, as if it could be deemed capable of affording any sanction to a complicated system of iniquity. I thought it my duty to appeal at that time to the whole body of Bishops, in 'The Law of Retribution,'

Just Limitation demonstrates his combining the Jewish law and the Gospel, getting beyond legalism to their spirit. Like the Church Fathers, he interpreted scripture in light of other biblical principles. After quoting Leviticus 25:39-43, and 55 (a prohibition of enslaving destitute brothers) he states:

But how can a man be said to "behave righteously," who sells his brethren, or holds them in Slavery against their will? For, though, with Christ, "bond and free are accepted," yet it behoves the African Merchant very diligently to examine, whether he is not likely to forfeit his own acceptance, if he does not most heartily repent of having enslaved his brethren, and of having encouraged others to the same uncharitable practices, by misinterpreting the holy Scriptures. 80

In the Law of Liberty Sharp reduces the biblical injunctions to their least common denominator:

All the moral duties of the Gospel are briefly comprehended in the two single Principles of the Law of Moses, viz. The LOVE OF GOD, and THE LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOUR. Nothing, therefore, can be esteemed truly lawful under the Gospel, that is, in the least repugnant to either of these 81

Citing Matthew 25:45 ("what you have done unto the least of my brothers you have done unto me") he draws the above two principles (of Moses) into one: "that a Violation of the Love THAT IS DUE TO OUR NEIGHBOUR, is a Violation also of the LOVE OF GOD" ⁸² The application of these principles to slavery is obvious: "this compendious Law necessarily excludes the least Toleration of Slavery, or of any other Oppression,

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calling earnestly upon them, in the name of God, to stand up for the land, and make up the hedge, to save their country from the fatal consequences of slavery and oppression." (quoted in Hoare, op. cit., pp. 262-3.)

⁸⁰ Sharp, Just Limitation, pp. 16-17.

⁸¹ Sharp, Liberty, pp. 7-8.

⁸² Ibid., p. 19.

which an innocent Man would be unwilling to experience in his own person from another."⁸³

Sharp also called the Epistle of James into the issue:

This "Law of Liberty", [loving one's neighbour as one's self] this supream [sic], the "Royal Law", must therefore be our guide in the interpretation and examination of all Laws which relate to the Rights of Persons, because it excludes Partiality, or Respect of Persons, and consequently removes all ground for the pretence of any absolute Right of Dominion inherent in the Masters over their Slaves: for as all Ranks of Men are Equal in the Sight of God (the Christian Slave, or Servant, being the Freeman of the Lord, and the Christian Master the Servant of Christ, I Cor. vii. 22.) there is no doubt but that the same Christian Qualities are necessary to be maintained by the Christian Master, that are required of the Christian SERVANT; as Humility, Forgiveness of Trespasses or Debts, and (though not Submission, yet certainly) Brotherly Love towards Inferiors 84

The principles which James reveals "are absolutely incompatible with the oppressive and tyrannical Claims of our American Slave holders!"⁸⁵

In this entire argument Sharp was applying a new hermeneutical tool. His key to scripture was the love of God and neighbour; all must be interpreted in light of this. The golden rule could easily determine whether one's actions met the commands to love, and the test of reciprocity could certainly apply to slavery:

If the African merchants and American slaveholders can demonstrate that they would not think themselves injured by such treatment from others, they may perhaps be free from the horrid guilt of unchristian oppression and uncharitableness, which must otherwise inevitably be imputed to them, because their actions will not bear the test of that excellent rule of the Gospel above-mentioned, which Christ has laid down as the measure of our actions --

⁸³Sharp, Liberty, p. 23.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 31.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 32.

"All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets." 86

Although it seems to have been temporarily lost, Sharp's reasoning would have been extremely relevant to the argument of Thornwall and Dabney, during the American slavery controversy (nineteenth century). Apparently they were unaware of his works. (See also Chapter VI, [Benezet] pp.182ff.) It is noteworthy to observe similarities of thought and its development: not only Wesley's theology, but also the much later thought of Walter Rauschenbusch and Washington Gladden are based on the principles of the love of God and neighbour. The social implications were obvious, and were strongly applied to eighteenth century slavery by Sharp and Wesley.

Sharp also found the enslaving of others to be wrong because of the Biblical admonitions regarding treatment of fellow Jews. His scriptural logic can be seen in his interpreting the Old Testament restrictions for enslaving one's Jewish brother, in light of the New Testament dictum "under the Gospel Dispensation, all mankind are to be esteemed our brethren."⁸⁷ This new brotherhood was possible because of the "inestimable privilege of all men becoming sons . . . to one almighty Father"⁸⁸ Thus the Gospel of Christ established the brotherhood of the Christian to every other man in the world. "The promises of God . . . are made to all mankind in general, without exception; so that a Negro, as well as any other man, is capable of becoming 'an adopted son of God;' an 'heir of God through Christ'; a 'temple of the Holy-Ghost'"⁸⁹ Treatment of one's brother

⁸⁶ Sharp, Just Limitation, p. 45 (quoting Matthew 7:12)

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 18-19.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 19.

could not be less than the Old Testament demanded of Jews for their brothers:

I have already sufficiently proved that every man under the Gospel is to be considered as our neighbour AND brother, and consequently, whatever was "just and equal" to be given by a Jew, to his neighbour or Hebrew brother under the Old Testament, the same must, necessarily, be considered as "just and equal", and absolutely due from Christians to men of all nations without distinction, whom we are bound to treat as brethren under the Gospel in whatever capacity they serve us. Let the American slaveholder therefore remember, that even according to the Jewish law, (if he argues upon it as a Christian ought to do) he is absolutely indebted to each of his slaves for every days labour beyond the first six years of his Servitude. "In the seventh year (said the Lord by Moses) thou shalt let him go Free from thee. And when thou sendeth him out Free from thee, thou Shalt Not Let Him Go Away Empty." If this was the indispensable duty even of Jews! how much more is it "just and equal to be observed by Christians?" 90

This line of reasoning (used by Sharp in 1776) would be used later

by Ramsay.⁹¹ It also appears again by Sharp in his refutation of

Thomas Thompson.⁹² It should be pointed out however, that while Ramsay,

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 62-4.

⁹¹ James Ramsay, Objections to the Abolition of the Slave Trade With Answers, 1788, p. 76; Examination of the Rev. Mr. Harris's Scriptural Researches on the Licitness of the Slave-Trade, 1788, p. 22. (See Chapter IV (Ramsay) p. 84.

⁹² Sharp, Some Remarks, op. cit., after quoting Lev. 25:39 "If thy brother that dwelleth with thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee, thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bond-servant; but as a hired servant and a sojourner he shall be with thee, and shall serve thee unto the year of jubilee; and then shall he depart from thee, and he and his children with him", Sharp goes on to explain: "This was the utmost servitude that a Hebrew could lawfully exact from any of his brethren of the house of Israel, unless the servant entered voluntarily into a perpetual servitude. And let me add, that it is also the very utmost servitude that can lawfully be admitted among Christians, because we are bound, as Christians, to esteem every man our brother and our neighbour, which I have already proved; so that this consequence which I have drawn is absolutely unavoidable. The Jews, indeed, who do not yet acknowledge the commands of Christ, may perhaps still think themselves justified, by the law of Moses, in making partial distinctions between their brethren of Israel and other men; but it would be inexcusable in Christians: and therefore I conclude that we certainly have no right to exceed the limits of servitude which the Jews were bound to observe whenever their poor brethren were sold to them: and I apprehend that we must not venture even

and even Clarkson used scripture to some extent, they did not develop a systematic and comprehensive scriptural argument as did Sharp.

Further, Sharp related the concept that all men are our brothers to the noted twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, where men are judged by how they treated Christ in the form of the naked, hungry, thirsty etc. In fact, Sharp ends his Just Limitation by quoting that same passage and associating believing slaves with "the least of these my brethren," and implying those he "never knew" to be the ones who worked hardships on the negroes.⁹³

But proponents of slavery had stated, and rightly so, that nowhere in the New Testament was there a direct prohibition of slavery. On the contrary, there were admonitions for slaves' obedience, and even the case of Paul sending Onesimus back to his master, Philemon. Sharp does not ignore the oft cited texts (I Cor. 7:21; Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:22-3; I Tim. 6:1-8 and Titus 2:9-10) but declares that the New Testament is actually silent (in a direct sense) on the issue of slavery because we only have recorded advice to Christian slaves, not to masters. "But this absolute submission required of Christian servants, by no means

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to go so far, because the laws of brotherly love are infinitely enlarged and extended by the Gospel of Peace, which proclaims GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN without distinction; and because we cannot truly be said to love our neighbours as ourselves, or to do to others as we would they should do unto us, whilst we retain them against their will in a despicable servitude, as slaves and private property, or mere chattels. The glorious system of the Gospel destroys all narrow national partiality, and makes us citizens of the world, by obliging us to profess universal benevolence; but more especially are we bound, as Christians, to commiserate, and assist to the utmost of our power, all persons in distress or captivity, whatsoever the 'worshipful Committee of Merchants trading to Africa' may think of it, or their advocate the Rev. Mr. Thompson." (quote from Some Remarks, found in Hoare, op. cit., Appendix IX, p. xxiii.)

⁹³ Sharp, Just Limitation, pp. 36-7, 67.

implies the legality of slave holding ON THE PART OF THEIR MASTERS" ⁹⁴ Where "believing masters" are referred to (I Tim. 6:2), Sharp maintains that "this text was intended to regulate the conduct of Christian servants, and not that of Christian masters." ⁹⁵ He feels that if we did have advice to masters, it would be in keeping with other New Testament concepts, toward freedom, generosity, benevolence and recompence, and it would "necessarily effect the entire abolition of slavery!" ⁹⁶ Further he states that ". . . the oppression of the slaveholder can no more be justified by any text of the New Testament, that I am able to find, than the oppression of the striker and robber." ⁹⁷ Sharp has just stated that the "turn the other cheek" ideal does not justify the striker to do his evil. ⁹⁸

Sharp continues his argument by asserting that Christians are "bought with a price", and therefore not to be the servants of men, but of God. It would be sacrilegious for a Christian master to appropriate "to himself, as an absolute property, that body, which peculiarly belongs to God by an inestimable purchase." ⁹⁹ Even the Old Testament supports this when God said of the Jews: "'They are MY SERVANTS, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt; THEY SHALL NOT BE SOLD AS BONDSMEN.'" ¹⁰⁰ He goes on: "How much more ought Christians to esteem their brethren,

⁹⁴ Sharp, Passive Obedience, p. 11.

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 23-27, quote, pp. 26-27.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 36, n.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 41.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 40.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 19. (quoting Lev. 25:52)

as the peculiar servants of God on account of their being freed from the more severe bondage of our spiritual enemy, (of which the Egyptian bondage was only a type) by the inestimable price of Christ's blood!"¹⁰¹

And in regard to the question of Onesimus, often cited as New Testament support for slavery, Sharp posits that Paul, as an apostle could have retained Onesimus, but out of charity did not. "And yet, that which he really did say, or require in behalf of Onesimus, was as strong a recommendation to favour and superior kindness as could be expressed. He required him [Philemon] to receive Onesimus, 'not now as a servant, but above a servant, as a BROTHER beloved,'"¹⁰² The phrase in which Paul asked Philemon to put any debt of Onesimus on his [Paul's] account, Sharp interprets to include even the debt of service.¹⁰³ Thus, there would "be a complete discharge of all the master's temporal demands on Onesimus; and therefore it is a strange perversion of the apostle's meaning to cite this epistle, in favour of slavery, when the whole tenor of it is in behalf on the slave!"¹⁰⁴ Sharp also contends that Onesimus was a minister, and preacher; thus Paul would not have sent him back to slave service.¹⁰⁵

Without doubt, Sharp's logic and argument were very effective. This is especially true with respect to his work in the legal arena. He is cited as the man who prevented slavery from taking root in England.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 19-20.

¹⁰² Sharp, Essay on Slavery, (London: 1773), pp. 33-34.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., cf. Chapter IV (Ramsay) pp. 85-6.

His work in opposing slavery from scripture is equally sound, but apparently was not as widely acknowledged. This is possibly due to the different audiences. The legal issue was one of confrontation, over specific cases. Evidence had to be noted and decisions made. The Biblical issue was not so direct. Laws affecting the public would not be based on it, rather the opinions of the public were subjective, and only an attempt could be made to modify them. In addition, Sharp's style could be cumbersome, and his eccentricity sometimes came through his writing.¹⁰⁶ And yet, he was republished by Benezet (with considerable editing), and his advice to the American colonies was "regarded as rules for further procedure."¹⁰⁷

We must conclude that at least in the ground work stage of abolition, Sharp's argument was effective, his role, integral. In many ways he laid the foundation for those who would follow. It would be extremely interesting to project the possible outcomes had Sharp been in America and invested his antislavery energies in that context, rather than in England.

III

ATTITUDE TOWARD THE IDEA OF NEGRO INFERIORITY

While Sharp's attitude toward slavery appears to have been firm soon after his early involvement in the cause (from his involvement with Jonathan Strong in 1767), he approached the question of Negro inferiority without bias, toward either side. Writing Jacob Bryant in 1772 he expressed: "I am far from having any particular esteem for the negroes,

¹⁰⁶His footnotes at times continue for ten complete pages, and often carry footnotes to themselves.

¹⁰⁷Hoare, op. cit., p. 104.

but . . . I think myself obliged to consider them as Men"108

His desire was to understand the truth about the black man, his origins and abilities. He continued in his letter to Bryant:

. . . I am certainly obliged, also, to use my best endeavours to prevent their being treated as beasts, by our unchristian countrymen, who deny them the privileges of human Nature; and, in order to excuse their own brutality, will scarcely allow that negroes are human beings. 109

From his study of the Old Testament Sharp rejected polygenesis and with help from Bryant discounted the "curse of Canaan" as justification for black slavery. The evidence of Sharp and Bryant indicated that Africans were not descended from Canaan (the recipient of Noah's curse), but from his brothers Cush and Phut.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Letter from Sharp to Jacob Bryant, 19 October, 1772, bound in Sharp's Works, (an unpublished collection of 6 vols., vol. 2, housed in the University of Edinburgh's Library, *V 24.64) appendix, No. 3, p. 45; (also quoted in Hoare, op. cit., p. 94, n.)

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 45-46.

¹¹⁰ Sharp, Just Limitation, p. 48, "For Africans are not descended from Canaan, if we except the Carthaginians (a colony from the sea coast of the land of Canaan) who were a free people, and at one time rivalled, even the Roman common wealth, in power. The Africans are principally descended from the three other sons of Ham, viz. Cush, Misraim, and Phut; and to prove this more at large I have subjoined to this tract a letter which I received . . . from a learned gentlemen who has most carefully studied the antiquities of the line of Ham: the insinuation therefore concerning the 'sentence expressed against Canaan' can by no means justify the African Slave trade" Sharp's letter to Bryant, of 19 October, 1772 indicates his earlier understanding "I had always supposed that black men in general were descended from Cush, because a distinction in colour from the rest of mankind, seems to have been particularly attributed to his descendents, the Cushim, even to a proverb, 'Can the Cushie (commonly rendered Ethiopian) change his Skin,' &c. (Jeremiah, xiii. 23.) and therefore I concluded that all negroes as well East Indian as African, are entitled to the general name of Cushim, as being probably, descended from different branches of the same stock" (Sharp's Works, (appendix 3, pp. 44-45.) Bryant's response: ". . . all the natives of Africa are more or less swart: and even among the negroes there are a great variety of tints, from a light copper colour to the darkest black. All the inhabitants of this vast continent are assuredly the sons of Ham: but not equally descended from Chus." ". . . Africa was peopled from Ham, by more families than one." "We learn from scripture, that Ham has four sons, Chus, Mizraim, Phut and Canaan, Gen. x. v. 6. Canaan occupied Palestine, and the country called by his name: Mizraim Egypt: But Phut passed deep into Africa, and, I believe, most of the nations in that part

From 1776 Sharp strongly refuted negro inferiority.¹¹¹ He spoke of the "dignity and equality of Human Nature."¹¹² The openmindedness which he had demonstrated while exploring the issue could not tolerate conclusions that were biased and not supported by reliable facts. Thus when David Hume based his view of negro inferiority on the apparent lack of negro arts and sciences, Sharp retorted:

'To civilise a nation, is a work which it requires long time to accomplish. And one may as well say of an infant, that he can never become a man, as of a nation now barbarous, that it never can be civilised.'¹¹³

'To suppose him of an inferior species, because he does not thus distinguish himself by ingenious arts and sciences⁷, is just as rational, as to suppose any private European of an inferior species, because he has not raised himself to the condition of royalty.'¹¹⁴

Likewise he took issue with Long's deductions of negro inferiority, based on the supposed inability of mulattoes to reproduce. Sharp's copy of Long's History of Jamaica, has Sharp's counter argument written in the margin (p.33).¹¹⁵

Thus it appears that Sharp opposed the idea of negro inferiority on numerous bases, including his view of the dignity of man, scriptural

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of the world are descended from him: at least more than from any other person." (Sharp's Works, (appendix 4, p. 48) "They are certainly the sons of Ham: and, what is more to the purpose, they are the workmanship of God, formed in his image with a living Soul; as well as ourselves. Consequently they deserve better treatment, than they have generally experienced from those, who look upon themselves, as more enlightened, and possessed of a greater degree of humanity. I join with you sincerely in detesting the cruel traffic" (Sharp's Works, p. 51)

¹¹¹ Sharp, Just Limitation, p. 27, n.

¹¹² Sharp, The Law of Nature, 1777, pp. 205-6. (Hereafter referred to as "Nature".)

¹¹³ Sharp, Just Limitation, p. 29.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

¹¹⁵ Hoare, op. cit., appendix iv, pp. ix-x.

inferences, the logical relationship of slavery to negro inferiority, human moral behaviour and history. In his Law of Nature, Sharp explores the nature of man, particularly trying to identify "principles of action in man." In this work he does posit the dignity and equality of all human beings.¹¹⁶ An application of this view can also be seen in his mentioning the "rights of women."¹¹⁷ It is interesting to note similar values in John Newton when he attempted to protect his women slaves from sexual exploitation by his crew.¹¹⁸

Certainly Sharp's view of man was influenced by his reverence for scripture. He contended that "the universal moral laws, and those of natural equity" are plentiful in Old Testament law, as well as in Jesus' fulfillment of the true law.¹¹⁹ In fact, so strongly did he associate the teachings of scripture with the belief in negro equality that those who asserted negro inferiority, he labelled infidels:

We have likewise instance of infidelity, or at least of a total neglect of Scripture authority and revelation, in an attempt of two late writers to prove that Negroes are 'an inferior species of man' 120

Closely aligned to this was Sharp's staunch belief in monogenesis, which was under some attack by proponents of negro inferiority.

Sharp did realise that one significant reason behind the thesis of negro inferiority was its utility to justify slavery. Again in the

¹¹⁶ Sharp, Nature, especially, pp. 205-6.

¹¹⁷ When teaching Omai, the South Sea Islander (1776), Sharp stated that polygamy breaks the perfect law of liberty and is "against the rights of women." Hoare, op. cit., p. 150; Lascelles, op. cit., pp. 110-111.

¹¹⁸ See Chapter II (Newton), pp. 45-6.

¹¹⁹ Sharp, Some Remarks (in Hoare, op. cit., Appendix IX, p. xxii).

¹²⁰ Sharp, Just Limitation, p. 27, n.

margin of History of Jamaica, Sharp expressed himself:

All this atheistical doctrine from Hume about 'different species of men,' and Mr. Estwick's notions that the Negroes are 'incapable of moral sensations, and perceive them only as simple ideas,' etc., are indiscriminately adopted by the author of an History of Jamaica (. . . said to be written by Mr. Long) . . . for the same uncharitable purpose of degrading the Negroes below the dignity of men, in order to vindicate the inhuman pretensions of the West-Indian slave-holder to treat them like brutes! 121

And even more concisely: ". . . the purpose and intention of such arguments was to deprive a very great part of mankind of the common rights and dignity of human nature, in order to justify the enslaving and treating them as brute beasts" 122 Although Sharp saw this relationship, he did not give it the attention that Wilberforce did in his writings. 123 Throughout all of Sharp's writings there are only several passages dealing with inferiority proposed for the purpose of justifying slavery.

On the basis of moral behaviour Sharp maintained that no case could be made for negro inferiority. Inferiority is a comparative term, and demands a contrasting group of "superiors." By comparing the moral values of West Indian whites and blacks, he undercut any presupposition of white moral superiority:

¹²¹Sharp's marginal notes on Long's History of Jamaica, p. 33, (quoted in Hoare, op. cit., appendix iv, p. ix.) The work by Estwick he refers to is: Samuel Estwick, Consideration on the Negro Cause Commonly So Called, (first published in 1772). This tract was written as an attempt to persuade Lord Mansfield to rule against Somerset in the benchmark slave case of 1772. Sharp is here referring to material found in Estwick's work, p. 79.

¹²²Ibid., pp. x-xi.

¹²³See Chapter I (Wilberforce), pp. 15-19.

But what shall we think of the inferiority of the Negroes, when we read what this author [Long] allows concerning the propensity of the White men to 'cohabit with Negresses and Mulattoes, free or slaves,' since not one in 'twenty can be persuaded' (says he) 'that there is either sin or shame in cohabiting with his slave,' &c. p. 327. And in p. 330, speaking of the 'public and avowed keeping of Negro or Mulatto mistresses,' he says, 'Habit, however, and the prevailing fashion, reconcile such scenes.' What must we think I say, therefore, of the pretended inferiority of the Negroes, if their women have such notorious influence over their White masters? We must either conclude that this author has been guilty of gross and wicked misrepresentation in comparing them with apes and ourang outangs or else that almost all the white inhabitants of our islands ('not one in twenty' being excepted by him) are guilty of gross and abominable bestiality! Let the refined author show his 'moral sensations' and superiority of discernment to that of the Negroes in choosing which side of the dilemma suits him best! In short, all that he, Mr. Hume, and Mr. Estwick, have presumed on this supposed natural inferiority of the Negroes, is utterly indiscriminate, and without foundation. 124

So adamant was Sharp in contesting the views of those who thus "proved" negro inferiority, that he turned their statements against them, to demonstrate their inferiority rather than the negroes'. Where Long has said that "such matches [mulattoes with mulattoes] have generally been defective," he retorts "the defect is only in his own argument, as mules and mulattoes are utterly dissimilar in the very point on which he has founded the comparison."¹²⁵ And where Long, Hume and Estwick have described negro inferiority with terms like "brutality," a lack of "moral sensations," "indistinguishable from the highest species of brutes," and their "perception by simple ideas," Sharp responds:

. . . it must be allowed that there never were greater instances of 'brutality,' or more manifest tokens of a want of 'moral sensations,' than what those writers themselves have shown us in their own wicked attempts against the Negroes! How shall we distinguish such writers 'from

¹²⁴ Sharp, Marginal notes in Long's History of Jamaica, p. 33, (quoted in Hoare, op. cit., Appendix iv, p. x).

¹²⁵ Ibid.

the HIGHEST SPECIES OF BRUTES?' By their shape?
by their speech? or in their 'perception by SIMPLE
IDEAS?' Yet surely not their 'MORAL SENSATIONS!'
for in that respect their humanity is plainly deficient.¹²⁶

Even history demonstrated for Sharp the lack of foundation for
Negro inferiority. Citing his grandfather, the archbishop, he reminds
that Tertullian, Origen, Clemens [sic], Cyprian and Augustine were
products of Africa.¹²⁷

Finally, it must be noted that Sharp's attitudes and actions are
consistently within what would later be called the conversionist pattern.
An initial gauge is to compare a man's attitudes towards Africans with
his attitudes towards other uncivilised groups. In the case of Sharp
we find an interesting comparison. In 1776 he encountered Omai, a
south sea islander, brought to London by Captain Furneaux. While many
regarded him as something of an attraction, Sharp secured permission to
educate him, and spent some fifteen two hour sessions with him.¹²⁸
The training involved English and (probably informally) principles of
Judeo-Christian religion. Regarding Sharp's aspirations for this
endeavour, Hoare indicates that he:

. . . not only felt a deep concern for the individual
proselyte, but perceived an inlet opened, by his means,
for the diffusion of Christian light over a new race of
men; and he was anxious to suffer no moment for redemption
to be lost. The knowledge of our language was the prelim-
inary step and . . . he diligently pursued his design of
explaining to his pupil . . . the divine truths of our
Religion 129

¹²⁶Ibid., pp. x-xi. In this passage, Sharp is particularly
quoting Estwick again, Considerations on the Negro Cause p. 79.

¹²⁷Sharp, Just Limitation, p. 44, n.

¹²⁸Lascelles, op. cit., 108-109; Hoare, op. cit., p. 149.

¹²⁹Hoare, op. cit., p. 149.

Five years later a similar opportunity presented itself, but this time with an African. Sharp's responses were consistent, and he began actually to oversee the education of the son of King Naimbanha.¹³⁰ The boy's father died and his education was cut short. Unfortunately on the passage home, the boy died as well. Sharp's conversionist expectations are reflected in his ensuing report to the Sierra Leone Company:

'Thus terminated the days of this amiable and enlightened African, from whose exertions, if he had lived, the Company might have expected the most important and extensive services. It may be remarked however, that, notwithstanding his untimely and much to be lamented death, he has rendered at least one important service to his country, by furnishing a memorable instance of the effect of education on the mind of Africans, and a most encouraging and happy omen in favour of his benighted countrymen.' 131

Further, Sharp's goals are reflected through the desires of his student, whose homeward voyage was thus described: "Numberless were the plans which he amused himself with devising, for the purpose of spreading Christianity, and opening the eyes of his rude countrymen" ¹³²

On 1 August, 1786 Sharp wrote the Archbishop of Canterbury to encourage the ordaining of one Fraser who would act as a missionary among the Sierra Leone settlers. Sharp maintained that Fraser was "capable of doing great good among them," and "as the settlers earnestly desire to have a Clergyman with them, I humbly submit to your Grace, whether so favourable an opportunity of promoting religious instruction in the

¹³⁰ Ibid., pp. 367-8 (November 11, 1781).

¹³¹ Report quoted in Hoare, op. cit., p. 371. (report, March, 1794).

¹³² Ibid.

wilds of Africa should be suffered to pass away without improvement."¹³³

From this it is apparent that Sharp felt the importance of Christianising the Africans, or any other uncivilised heathen. In 1789 he received a letter from the Rev. Samuel Hopkins of America who wanted to send a group of blacks with their own black pastor, back to Africa for "the practice of Christianity," and spreading "the knowledge of it among the Africans . . . and introducing into that hitherto-uncivilised country the arts of husbandry, building mills and houses, and other mechanic arts, and raising tobacco, coffee, cotton, indigo, &c., for exportation as well as for their own use."¹³⁴ This was clearly a plan that corresponded with later conversionist goals. Only because things were going poorly at Sierra Leone did Sharp hesitate to respond with an invitation. In this case he seems to have accepted without comment the concept of blacks Christianising Africa, and civilising it.

Hoare mentions that among Sharp's papers were some designed "for the instruction of the settlers" and some dealing with religion and government for Sierra Leone, which indicate "his unceasing earnestness to spread the light of Christianity and the benefits of useful knowledge over the world."¹³⁵ His interests were so well known by those involved with Sierra Leone, that he was called the "first civilizer of Africa,"¹³⁶ and when Sierra Leone was under the direction of the African Company,

¹³³ Ibid., pp. 261, ff., actual letter quoted p. 264. (In this same letter, Sharp deals with Burton's contemptuous letter to Benezet.)

¹³⁴ Hoare, op. cit., pp. 341-2.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 374.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 438.

he was appointed one of the first directors.¹³⁷ The appointment was a logical one as Sharp's goals for Africa were closely aligned with those stated by the company:

. . . to improve the temporal condition and moral faculties of the natives of Africa; to diffuse knowledge, and excite industry, by methods adapted to the peculiar situation and manners of the inhabitants; to watch over the execution of the laws that have been passed in this and other countries, for abolishing the African Slave Trade; and, finally to introduce the blessings of civilized society among a people sunk in ignorance and barbarism, and occupying no less than a fourth part of the habitable globe. 138

Certainly, Granville Sharp's high regard for the dignity and equality of human nature, coupled with his strong commitment to the principles of the Christian faith and its propagation, caused him to be a man apart from, but within the eighteenth century. He defended the negro in the law courts, wrote in his behalf, especially against those who devalued him, and worked to provide a haven where the black man could be educated and find independent employment (Sierra Leone). Sharp believed in the equality of all human beings, at least in a potential way. His desire and specific plans to Christianise and civilise the Africans constitute him as one of the formers of conversionist thought.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 440.

¹³⁸ Ibid. (second report of the African Institution)

IV

MOTIVATION

All of Sharp's motivation can be traced to a root of Christian humanitarianism, in the best sense of both words. It was humanitarianism in that it reached out to all those in need; Sharp extended his energies to help, whether the need was slavery or many other human needs. It was "Christian" in that his actions were based on scripture, and on his theology which he derived from scripture. What he did for his fellow man, he did "solely upon the sense of his duty as a Christian."¹³⁹

The foundation of his humanitarianism was simply the Biblical injunction to love one's neighbour:

. . . Christ has enlarged the antient [^{sic}] Jewish doctrine of loving our neighbours as ourselves; and has also taught us, by the parable of the good Samaritan, that all mankind, even our professed enemies . . . must necessarily be esteemed our neighbours whenever they stand in need of our charitable assistance; so that the same benevolence which was due from the Jew to his brethren of the house of Israel is indispensably due, under the Gospel, to OUR BRETHREN OF THE UNIVERSE, however opposite in religious or political opinions 140

This principle determined what behaviour was "right." For Sharp, once the right was known, there would be no wavering in action from that principle, regardless of rank, tradition or inconvenience:

Although I am a placeman, and indeed of a very inferior rank, yet I look on myself to be perfectly independent, because I have never yet been afraid to do and avow whatever

¹³⁹ Clarkson, History, Vol. 1, pp. 449-50.

¹⁴⁰ Sharp, Just Limitation, pp. 39-40. As we later examine the role of Wesley's theology to slavery and anti-slavery, it could be argued that Wesley's theology - (which was based on the two principles of loving God and neighbour) was indeed the foundation upon which thinkers such as Sharp connected their faith to their concern for the slave.

I thought just and right, without the consideration of consequences to myself; and it is a point with me, never to conceal my sentiments on any subject whatever, not even from my superiors in office, when there is a probability of answering any good purpose by it. 141

As a result, ". . . there was no concern of humanity in which he was not ready to take an active interest."¹⁴² Thus, when Sharp met Jonathan Strong in 1765, he responded out of brotherly love to nurse him back to health, help him find employment, and later defend him in court. Two years later, and into the court case, Sharp expressed the simplicity of his involvement: "If I appeared in favour of the Negro, it was because he was in distress."¹⁴³ As Lascelles has indicated, "When he had once convinced himself that some cause needed his help, no consideration as to the difficulties or magnitude of his task would deter him for a moment"¹⁴⁴ and he worked at it relentlessly. Writing to Benezet in 1773, he explained the delay in his correspondence:

¹⁴¹Letter from Sharp, recipient unidentified; quoted in Hoare, op. cit., p. 67. Hoare notes the same sentiments in Sharp's letter to Lord Carysfort, 1781: "This is the compendium or sum total of all my politics, so that I include them in a very small compass: I am thoroughly convinced that right ought to be adopted and maintained on all occasions, without regard to consequences either probable or possible; for these (when we have done our own duty as honest men) must, after all, be left to the disposal of Divine Providence, which has declared a blessing in favour of Right: 'Blessed are the keepers of judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times.' (Psalm cvi, 3." (Hoare, p. 67.)

¹⁴²Hoare, op. cit., p. 152.

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 43. The context of Sharp's remark is that he has just mentioned the liability (financially) of those who have offended Strong, but he will not press this measure, since his motive is to relieve distress, not bring it on six others.

¹⁴⁴Lascelles, op. cit., p. 136.

I found myself obliged to defer acknowledging your very sensible letters, for want of proper leisure; for I am really a sort of slave myself, being obliged to employ every day in the week, constantly, in the ordinary business of my office, and having no holidays but Sundays, as the branch that I am in [as ordnance clerk] requires more attendance than any in the whole office. However, every opportunity that I could possibly get to myself (and Sundays in particular, after service) has been employed in reading and collecting materials to forward the undertaking which you have so much at heart. 145

It was his humanitarianism that drove him to help others, predominantly, but not exclusively the negro. In 1786 he was elected Governor of Bridewell and Bethlem Hospitals.¹⁴⁶ Upon inheriting the manor of Fairsted in Essex, from Mrs. Oglethorpe, he planned to make it into a public charity.¹⁴⁷ He also promoted subscriptions for missionaries working in the West Indies,¹⁴⁸ was appointed to the first Chair of the British and Foreign Bible Society (1804), served as a member of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (1785), and there are indications that he supported groups dedicated to the conversion of the Jews. He attended meetings of the "African Association, Palestine Association, Refuge for the Destitute, Hibernian Society, Society for the Protection of Young Women [and] Female Penitentiary."¹⁴⁹ Certainly his concern for the slavery issue did not blind him to concerns

¹⁴⁵Sharp, letter to Benezet, 6 July, 1773, quoted in Hoare, op. cit., p. 129.

¹⁴⁶Hoare, op. cit., p. 389.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 385-6. Hoare goes on to mention that Sharp attempted to leave the estate to the poor, particularly females (for a vocational training and employment centre). When this plan failed he tried to leave it to the Bishop of London for "instruction of Negro Slaves in the Colonies." Although this plan was accepted, after his death the estate and manor were reclaimed by Mrs. Oglethorpe's heirs. (pp. 389-90)

¹⁴⁸Ibid., p. 388.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 431-37. quote from p. 446.

at home,¹⁵⁰ but all these concerns were an outgrowth of his humanitarianism. In fact, Sierra Leone can be seen as an expression of his humanitarianism. Had he been concerned only for the legal aspect of slavery in England, he would have rested content after the legal victories. On the contrary, his concern for the needs of individuals caused his reputation among unfortunate negroes to grow so that many came to him personally for help. It is said that he supported four hundred of them on a daily basis.¹⁵¹ The idea of Sierra Leone grew out of those needs. It would be an experiment to relieve poor blacks who had been freed by the Somerset decision (1772) but then had no livelihood. If returned to Africa and given a plot of land, they could become self-supporting and even build a trade with England. Hoare indicates that the negroes themselves began to come to Sharp for assistance to embark on the plan.¹⁵² In addition to relieving the great needs of free negroes, Sharp saw Sierra Leone as another help in destroying the slave trade.¹⁵³

Sharp's extensive involvement in helping others leaves no doubt that he took seriously the admonition to love one's neighbour. It was the foundation of his philanthropy. So seriously was he committed to it that he would have considered himself "guilty" of disobeying God had he acted in a manner any less involved. In fact, when the Committee

¹⁵⁰ This point is also made by Davis (Revolution), p. 394.

¹⁵¹ Hoare, op. cit., p. 260.

¹⁵² Ibid., Hoare quotes Sharp in a letter to his brother, January, 1788: "In the mean time, a proposal was made to them [negroes] by the late Mr. Smeathman, to form a free settlement at Sierra Leone. Many of them came to consult me about the proposal: sometimes they came in large bodies together."

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 315; quoting Sharp: "The opinion . . . of my late worthy friend Dr. Fothergill, that the establishment of a free settlement on the coast of Africa for honourable trade would be the most effectual means of destroying the Slave Trade, has so far been always my own opinion, that it induced me to advance much more money than a private person in my situation ought to have done, among the first settlers, to encourage their embarkation last year." Sharp states these expenses to be 1735 pounds.

for the Abolition of the Slave Trade agreed to attack only the slave trade at first, leaving slavery itself for later, Sharp, "did not hesitate to pronounce all present guilty before God, for shutting those, who were then slaves all the world over, out of the pale of their approaching labours."¹⁵⁴

Sharp's humanitarianism was certainly influenced by his theology. That he had a very high view of human life is reflected in his protests against the impressing of seamen and duelling. Impressing was based on "respect of persons, which the law itself abhors, and which religion strictly forbids."¹⁵⁵ And certainly there were more logical, humane and Christian methods of settling a difference, than the duel. Although not a pacifist in the strictest sense, he promoted peace with America. He did this by working for Parliamentary reform, to allow for American representation.¹⁵⁶

Sharp's view of man also supported his involvement in the anti-slavery cause. While he saw the wickedness of the human race, he also believed in the dignity of every individual. Davis indicates that:

. . . he harbored what Sir James Stephen described as a settled conviction of the wickedness of the human race, 'tempered by an infantile credulity in the virtue of each separate member of it . . . a burning indignation against injustice and wrong, reconciled with pity and long-suffering towards the individual oppressor.' ¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 415. quoting Clarkson's History (1808).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 171.

¹⁵⁶ Lascelles, op. cit., p. 103. It is of interest that Sharp resigned as ordnance clerk because he could not in conscience supply arms for the destruction of Americans whom he saw as fellow subjects. See Hoare, pp. 123-4.

¹⁵⁷ Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, p. 391. Lascelles takes a simpler approach, saying that Sharp had "unbounded faith in human nature." (Lascelles, p. 136).

It would appear that Sharp's early involvement in antislavery grew out of a simple Christian humanitarianism, but this led him into a deep searching of the scriptures, in order to know what the Bible said about the issue, or principles related to it. The result of his search was different from the assertions of the pro-slavery camp and led to a very strong motivation for Sharp, that of defending the honour of scripture and Christianity. As early as 1772, Sharp, in a letter to Benezet, indicates this purpose: "My former tracts were built chiefly on the laws of England; but my present work is for the most part founded on Scripture, to obviate the doctrines of some late writers and disputers, who have ventured to assert that slavery is not inconsistent with the Word of God."¹⁵⁸ That which Sharp was probably writing was his series of four tracts published in 1776, wherein he clarifies his purpose:

. . . I am laid under a double obligation to answer them [the advocates of slavery who support it from scripture] because it is not the cause of Liberty alone for which I now contend, but for that which I have still much more at heart, the honour of the holy Scriptures, the principles of which are entirely opposite to the selfish and un-charitable pretensions of our American Slaveholders and African traders. 159

The task of defending the scriptures had motivated Sharp even before he had become involved in the slavery issue. In 1765 he had written against Dr. Kennicott's proposed Old Testament translation because he feared it would undermine the people's confidence in the scriptures.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Sharp to Benezet, 21 August, 1772, quoted in Hoare, op. cit., p. 101.

¹⁵⁹ Sharp, Just Limitation, pp. 2-3.

¹⁶⁰ Hoare, op. cit., p. 132. In fact, Sharp sent his critique to Kennicott, who then modified his work, removing that which Sharp was warning about (allegations of corruptions in the Hebrew text of Ezra and Nehemiah). Sharp's response is another indicator of his own clear-cut motives. When he learned of Kennicott's modification, he refrained from publishing his tract. See Hoare, pp. 132 ff.

When Benezet requested Sharp to refute Dr. Burton's (of the S.P.G.) reply to Benezet, Sharp refused, not wanting to publicly call the S.P.G. into question. However, when the S.P.G. missionary, Thomas Thompson published his scriptural defense of slavery, Sharp did publish a refutation. In 1786 he explained his rationale: The principal object of my writing was to remove the stigma thrown on our Holy Religion, as if it could be deemed capable of affording any sanction to a complicated system of iniquity.¹⁶¹

It is very interesting to note the same motive in the response of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, to Benezet, although it posits the opposite response to slavery. They reasoned that since the Bible does not condemn slavery, but gives precepts to both slaves and master, "the doctrine that slave-keeping was unlawful might undermine the authority of Scripture."¹⁶²

In addition to Sharp's Christian humanitarianism and his desire to defend the scriptures, he was also motivated by a love for his country and what it stood for. In his early struggles he worked as "a discoverer and vindicator of the true law of England,"¹⁶³ because he heartily believed in the laws of his country, and the higher laws they were based on. Even in the American conflict he wanted "to preserve his country from the imputation of injustice . . . and from the expense of a war."¹⁶⁴ He opposed Roman Catholics being admitted as

¹⁶¹Letter from Sharp to the Archbishop of Canterbury, 1 August, 1786, quoted in Hoare, pp. 262-3.

¹⁶²Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, p. 375. Letter from S.P.G. to Benezet in Brookes, op. cit., pp. 417-18.

¹⁶⁴Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, p. 376.

¹⁶⁴Hoare, op. cit., p. 179.

Members of Parliament because he felt it would threaten the existence of national freedom,¹⁶⁵ and he worked to reform Parliament pushing for representation of persons, not property, going back to what he felt were the inherent rights of the English.¹⁶⁶

His love of country also made him desire to save it from God's retribution. Davis indicates that just prior to the war with America Sharp saw (like the New England pamphleteers) the abolition of slavery as a means of self-purification, and the way "to appease God's wrath."¹⁶⁷ One can perceive something of the Puritan reformer,¹⁶⁸ or even the Old Testament prophet in these motives.

Sharp's values were enhanced by a personality trait that responded to challenge. As Lascelles points out, he "learned Hebrew to defeat a Jew, Greek to defeat the Socinian, and Law to defeat Lord Mansfield."¹⁶⁹ It seemed that he was never in the majority, even with those who supported the same causes. He stood alone with the Committee in recommending that they fight both the slave trade and slavery, immediately. He was an idealist who would fight to the end for those ideals. Whenever he encountered the pragmatic in argument, he dismissed it for what it was, and refocused on the ideals, regardless

¹⁶⁵Ibid., p. 445.

¹⁶⁶Lascelles, op. cit., p. 105.

¹⁶⁷Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, p. 393.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., p. 389.

¹⁶⁹Lascelles, op. cit., p. 70.

of tradition or opposition.¹⁷⁰ Sharp is another man that stands out from the eighteenth century, directed not by the mores of the times, but from within. Certainly he felt the hand of Providence over his life work, having called the "Divine influence of the Holy Spirit upon Mankind" the "Supreme Principle of Action in Man."¹⁷¹ In fitting tribute, Prince Hoare, who knew Sharp personally, described him as:

a man who, gifted with rare endowments, and led by the disposing hand of Providence to good, found his heart irresistibly directed to the relief of unmerited sufferings, his reason aroused to the reproof of pernicious errors, and his whole soul filled with the desire of universal happiness. 172

¹⁷⁰Hoare, op. cit., p. 114. (citing Sharp's journal) "'G.S. then took the liberty of exclaiming very earnestly against the iniquity of attending to political or mercenary pleas for tolerating slavery and the Slave Trade, as being notorious instances of doing evil that good may come'" The same theme is seen in Sharp's letter to Lord Dartmouth, 10 Oct., 1772, p. 111 of Hoare. In writing General Oglethorpe about the pressing of seamen, Sharp speaks against pragmatism again: "'In short, the doctrine of necessity may be admitted to excuse some things of an indifferent nature, not evil in themselves, though prohibited by law, but never to justify iniquity and oppression, respect of persons'" (p. 161.)

¹⁷¹Sharp, Nature, p. 198.

¹⁷²Hoare, op. cit., p. 23.

CHAPTER VI

ANTHONY BENEZET

While Granville Sharp was called the "father of the [antislavery] cause in England," Anthony Benezet could well be termed the father of the entire cause of antislavery. As a Quaker he continued the battle begun by his fellows, George Keith, Benjamin Lay and William Sandiford, among others. But in Benezet the cause found expression which transcended a denominational concern.¹ Benezet was largely responsible for bridging the gap between the Quakers and the rest of the antislavery world.² In fact, he played an important role in the transmission of antislavery ideas from the Scottish Enlightenment to the English abolitionists. Both general ideas and extensive quotes of Wallace and Hutcheson (as well as the French Montesquieu) are contained in Benezet's writings. It is highly probable that many English abolitionists became familiar with the antislavery thought of the Scottish Philosophes through Benezet.³

Anthony Benezet was born in France in 1713.⁴ In 1715 his family left France because of religious persecution, lived in London until 1731 when they settled in Philadelphia.⁵ Sometime after 1731 Benezet became a Quaker,⁶ and served most of his adult life as a school teacher.

¹Rice, The Rise and Fall of Black Slavery, p. 200.

²Anstey, The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition 1760-1810, p. 235.

³Rice, op. cit., pp. 161-176.

⁴George S. Brookes, Friend Anthony Benezet, (Philadelphia, 1937), p. 154.

⁵Ibid., pp. 13, 18.

⁶Rice, op. cit., p. 198.

Tradition has it that one Benoît (from which Benezet is derived) was known as "the promoter of good roads [and] the builder of the historic bridge at Avignon which bears his name" ⁷ If true, how interesting that his descendent would help to construct a far more significant bridge of human liberation.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of Benezet to the antislavery cause. His writings were fundamental to the early stages of both American and English antislavery thought. Both his books and correspondence were important to Sharp's early legal victories. His Some Historical Account (1771) supplied the bulk of material and inspiration for Clarkson's prize winning essay, which was instrumental in his entering the cause. Likewise, Benezet supplied much of the thought for Wesley's Thoughts Upon Slavery (1774). Benezet and the English abolitionists both used and republished each others' works, freely abridging without previous permission (this is particularly true of Benezet, Sharp and Wesley).

On the American side, Benezet was influential in shaping Quaker policy on slavery and the slave trade. Further, he enlisted Benjamin Rush and Benjamin Franklin, among others, for the antislavery cause.

In his writings the arguments of religion and moral philosophy came together, aligning forces which had hitherto been functioning largely independently of one another. Anstey gives an insightful perspective of his role in the development of antislavery thought:

. . . Benezet . . . brings the moral philosophy of the age, with all its appealing emphasis on liberty, benevolence, happiness, justice, and so forth, to the support of a position reached on religious grounds, and so makes a more comprehensive case to the world at large. ⁸

⁷Brookes, op. cit., p. 1.

⁸Anstey, op. cit., p. 217.

Likewise, Davis sees Benezet's religious persuasion as foundational to a crucial dimension: ". . . it was the Quaker frame of mind that enabled men to disregard law and precedent, and to judge slavery by the Inner Light."⁹ In fact, prior to the Quaker antislavery writing, slavery could be (and was) justified in a legalistic sense. Economics, scripture (through prooftexting) and the developing hypothesis of negro inferiority provided a solid pro-slavery platform, which was difficult to attack rationally, or legally. However, the entire realm of "inner light," or spiritual intuitiveness created the possibility of a platform not necessarily dependent on law and precedent. Granville Sharp entered the cause through his intuitive feelings about the injustice of slavery. He then proceeded to defeat it through legal channels. On the other hand, Benezet appears to have worked almost exclusively within the "inner light" area, appealing to his fellow human beings to treat each other according to the golden rule and principles of humanity. While Sharp took pains to oppose slavery through a thorough system of exegesis and hermeneutics, Benezet simply assumed a stance which he felt was based on scripture, only mentioning a few texts. It is interesting to note that Wesley, like Benezet, remained within the "inner light" spectrum, opposing slavery simply because it was wrong. He did not bother to construct a thorough or systematic defence based on scripture.

At least in the early stages of antislavery two major currents can be detected. On the American side of the Atlantic, in Benezet can be seen the arena of the intuitive; on the English side, particularly in Sharp, the more cognitive and deductive approach. As the antislavery struggle gained momentum, the two threads became woven together into a crucial cord for the eventual victory.

⁹Davis, The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture, p. 307.

I

ATTITUDE TOWARD SLAVERY

While it has been said that Benezet "more frequently attacked the trade" than slavery itself,¹⁰ a close look at all his written material indicates that while he was opposed to the trade, he spoke out equivocally against the institution of slavery. This is seen from his earlier writing, his Epistle of 1754¹¹ throughout his work. Benezet saw the trade and slavery as interconnected, each supporting the other. Thus, often when he spoke against one, he was speaking against the other, although he had probably not come to an actual strategy as would the Committee later (to kill the institution of slavery by first killing the slave trade). This is more plausible since Benezet was in America, not England which controlled most of the slave trade. Benezet was simply opposed to both. In 1754 he exhorted ". . . all to avoid in any manner encouraging the practice of making slaves of our fellow-creatures."¹²

In condemning the slave trade Benezet stated that it was ". . . inconsistent with the plainest Precepts of the Gospel, dictates of reason, and every common sentiment of humanity."¹³ He also attacked the argument that the slave trade saved the lives of many African prisoners of war,

¹⁰ Clarkson, History, Vol. I, p. 167.

¹¹ Anthony Benezet, Epistle of 1754, quoted in Brookes, op. cit., pp. 475-77.

¹² Ibid., p. 475.

¹³ Anthony Benezet, A Caution to Great Britain and Her Colonies, in A Short Representation of the Calamitous State of the Enslaved Negroes in the British Dominions, (London, 1784), p. 5. (The 1784 was a new edition, the earlier being 1767, published in Philadelphia. The texts are identical, only the title is slightly different, the 1767 edition being: A Caution and Warning to Great Britain . . .) Hereafter referred to as "Caution". A similar quote is found in Benezet's letter to Abbé Raynal, July 16, 1781 where he mentions a "conduct so contrary to humanity, reason and religion." Quoted in Brookes, op. cit., p. 366.

who without the slave trade would have been executed. In fact, Benezet maintained that rather than saving the lives of Africa's war captives, the slave trade caused the majority of her wars.¹⁴ Those who took part in it were not merely guilty of injustice, but of murder:

Whoever, does, by unjust force or violence, deprive another of his liberty, and while he hath him in his power, continues to oppress him, by cruel treatment, as eventually to occasion his death, is actually guilty of murder. 15

So adamant was his opposition to the slave trade that in 1762 he challenged those involved in or supporting it either to justify the trade fully, or if this could not be done, to end it. If they chose the former, he admonished them to "justify it to the World, upon the Principles of Reason, Equity and Humanity"¹⁶ It is conceivable that the challenge was taken up by the planters, resulting in such works as Harris' and Thompson's scriptural defences of slavery and the slave trade.

Benezet was also opposed to slavery as an institution. While his views of freedom were not comprehensive from a twentieth century perspective, they were normative for his day. His goal was not freedom in an absolute sense, which he felt would allow ample opportunity for doing evil. It was only "freedom" when it restrained evil to allow all to do good, thus, he desired a qualified sort of freedom. Certainly slavery

¹⁴Benezet, Some Historical Account of Guinea, Its Situation, Produce and the General Disposition of its Inhabitants with an Inquiry into the Rise and Progress of the Slave Trade, Its Nature and Lamentable Effects, Philadelphia, (1771), p. iii. (Hereafter referred to as "Some Historical Account".) Anstey, op. cit., p. 216 mentions Benezet's treatment of this topic and his going into great detail to explain and demonstrate the hardship imposed on Africa, particularly the coastal area, by the slave trade.

¹⁵Benezet, Some Historical Account, p. 131.

¹⁶Benezet, A Short Account of That Part of Africa Inhabited by Negroes, (Philadelphia, 1762), p. 61. (Hereafter referred to as "Short Account".)

produced the opposite of Benezet's view of freedom; it prevented the opportunity of doing good and made it more possible for many to do evil.¹⁷

Benezet opposed the institution predominantly on two bases:
religion and natural law:

To live in ease and plenty by the toil of those whom violence and cruelty have put in our power, is neither consistent with Christianity nor common justice¹⁸

He saw a positive correlation between slavery and religion:

. . . where slave keeping prevails, pure religion and sobriety declines, as it evidently tends to harden the heart and render the soul less susceptible of that holy spirit of love, meekness, and charity, which is the peculiar character of a true Christian.¹⁹

Benezet felt one of the major reasons for the decline of religion was the practice of selling negroes away from their husbands or wives, causing them to be ". . . tempted to break their marriage covenants and live in adultery, in direct opposition to the laws of God and man" ²⁰

But Benezet's real principle of opposition was the golden rule:

If we continually bear in mind the royal law of doing to others as we would be done by, we shall never think of bereaving our fellow creatures of that valuable blessing

¹⁷ Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823, p. 266. Davis states: "Even absolute freedom, according to Anthony Benezet, 'can only consist in restraining Evil Doers by just and equitable Laws, that the Weak and Poor, may be as free as the Rich and Strong, for all men ought to be absolutely free to do good according to their ability; and if they are not free to do evil, it is not to be accounted a restraint upon liberty; but a restraint only upon Tyranny.'" (no source given by Davis)

¹⁸ Benezet, Epistle of 1754 (in Brookes, op. cit.,) p. 475. In 1771 (Some Historical Account, p. i) he affirmed that the slavery of negroes was inconsistent "with every christian and moral virtue."

¹⁹ Ibid. Benezet did comment specifically on the effect slavery had on the slave owners. See below, p. 176.

²⁰ Benezet, Epistle of 1754, p. 475.

liberty, nor endure to grow rich by their bondage.²¹

To break the golden rule was bad enough, but to break it in order to grow rich was doubly wrong. Benezet quoted James Foster in support:

"Of consequence we sacrifice our Reason, our Humanity, our Christianity to an unnatural sordid Gain."²²

For the Quakers the problem was even more clearly circumscribed. War was unequivocally wrong. Slaves were products of war in Africa, and a supply of slaves demanded atrocities which were anything but Christian. Even in 1754 Benezet could point his Quaker brothers to the only logical deduction: "How then can we . . . be so inconsistent with ourselves as to purchase such who are prisoners of war, and thereby encourage this unchristian practice" ²³ Quoting Richard Baxter, Benezet leveled severe charges both at slave traders and at those who purchase slaves:

'To go as pirates and catch up poor Negroes, or people of another land, that never forfeited life or liberty, and to make them slaves, and sell them, is one of the worst kinds of thievery in the world . . . and they that buy them and use them as beasts . . . and . . . neglect their souls are fitter to be called devils incarnate than christians'²⁴

Certainly the wrongs of slavery were made obvious by the truths of religion, even from the very beginning. In his extract of Philmore, Benezet noted the original order of domination and labour:

'God gave to Man Dominion over the fish of the sea . . . and over every creeping Thing . . . Gen. i. 26; but not to any one Man over another: Nor can one Man, on any

²¹Ibid.

²²Benezet, Short Account, p. 37.

²³Benezet, Epistle of 1754, (in Brookes, op. cit., p. 475). At this early date slavery would have been seen to depend on the slave trade, so buying slaves directly fueled the trade.

²⁴Benezet, Some Historical Account, pp. 83-4.

Supposition whatever, become the Property, or Part of the Goods or Estate, of another Man 25

And as for the argument that slavery was sanctioned in Old Testament law, if looked at more than superficially, the context would make the issue clear. "Jewish laws had great regard for justice," and proscribed meticulously the treatment of and relationships to slaves.²⁶ Even so, the Old Testament must now be seen in light of the New Testament, and in the Christian era, the division of Jew and gentile is removed.

Therefore:

. . . under christianity, whatever lenity was due from an Hebrew towards his country man must be due towards all; since the distinction of nations are removed, as to the point of humanity and mercy, as well as natural right. 27

In this passage Benezet was directly quoting Hutcheson. This is the same argument used by Sharp (1776) and Ramsay (1788). It is possible that these men developed this position independently, but it is equally feasible that it began with Hutcheson and was passed on through Benezet to Sharp and Ramsay.²⁸ At the core, Benezet's religious argument against slavery was the spiritual equality of all men, who are "but a little lower than the Angels:"²⁹

Can we restrain our just indignation, when we consider that they [the slaves] are undoubtedly his brethren! his neighbours! the children of the same father; and

²⁵Benezet, Short Account, p. 38. Pages 37-63 of Short Account contain the extract of Philmore's Two Dialogues on the Man-Trade, (London, 1760). The same thought (as this quote contains) is also found in Caution, pp. 28-9.

²⁶Benezet, Extracts from the Writings of Several Noted Authors, p. 40 (No publisher or date is given, but it is bound with Benezet's 1784 edition of Caution. Included in these Extracts are full quotes of Wallace, Hutcheson and Foster.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸See above, Chapters IV and V, pp. 84 and 133-5 respectively.

²⁹Benezet, Short Account, p. 42.

some of those for whom Christ died, as truly as for the planter himself. 30

Thus, for Benezet there could be no talk of the "right" of holding men as slaves because ". . . the Right by which these Men hold the Negroes in Bondage, is not other than what is derived from those who stole them . . . that which robbers have over their prey" ³¹ And to those who hinted that slavery was an opportunity of spreading Christianity, Benezet incisively stated that to defend slavery for the sake of Christianity was like saying the Spanish Inquisition was done in love. ³²

In Benezet's opposition to slavery, can be seen a blending of the Christian perspective and natural law. His natural law emphasis was founded largely on the thought of the Scottish Enlightenment. Quoting George Wallace (whom Benezet cites as "Wallis") he maintained that liberty is not saleable. Every man has a right to his freedom. ³³ Citing Francis Hutcheson he opposed slavery on points of humanity, mercy and natural right. The analogy was made that prisoners of war do not owe their lives to those who saved them any more than those helped by a midwife or a physician forfeit the rights of their lives to their

³⁰ Benezet, Some Historical Account, p. 94. (italics his)

³¹ Benezet, Short Account, p. 64.

³² A Mite Cast into the Treasure: or, Observations on Slave-Keeping, (Philadelphia, 1772), p. 20. (Hereafter referred to as "Slave Keeping") Although authorship of this tract is not certain, it was probably written by Benezet. It corresponds with both his thought and style (Quaker syntax) in other works and is bound together with his Caution and Warning (1767 edition). Cf. Chapter IV pp. 89-90, n. 42.

³³ In a passage quoted from Wallace, Benezet appealed to natural law, but in a "golden rule" context. Wallace had suggested a hypothetical reversal, with his own countrymen being kidnapped into slavery. How would they look upon their natural rights? "Have not these unfortunate Africans, who meet with the same cruel fate the same right? Are not they men as well as we, and have they not the same sensibility? Let us not, therefore, defend or support a usage which is contrary to all the laws of humanity." (Benezet, Caution, pp. 29-30, Short Account, pp. 31-33, Some Historical Account, p. 137.)

helpers.³⁴ The fact is that Benezet believed his "fellow-creatures" to be "as free as ourselves by nature,"³⁵ and ". . . every individual of the human species by the law of nature comes into the world equally intitled [sic] to freedom at a proper age"³⁶ The idea of the "proper age" was for Benezet the issue of maturity and was applied without racial discrimination.³⁷

The concepts of John Locke also played a part in Benezet's opposition: "Every man has a property in his own person, this no body has a right to but himself, the labour of his body, and work of his hands are his own."³⁸ It was the law of nature: "For . . . to have absolute arbitrary power over another, is a power which nature never gives"³⁹ Undeniably this law was contradicted by slave ship captains, who were ". . . the sovereign arbiters of the lives of the miserable negroes"⁴⁰

In 1782 Benezet also refuted slavery on the basis of natural law as reflected in the American Declaration of Independence. In a unique exposure of a double standard, he described the American position on

³⁴Benezet, Short Account, pp. 34-5; Benezet is quoting from Hutcheson's System of Moral Philosophy, p. 211. He quotes the same material of Hutcheson in Caution, p. 31.

³⁵Benezet, Caution, p. 3.

³⁶Benezet, Slave Keeping, p. 9.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 13; Here Benezet exhorts "to set your negroes free at the same age your own children are They have as good a right to their freedom at twenty-one . . . as your own sons"

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 23.

³⁹*Ibid.* The only exception to this, according to Benezet is the power over captives in a just war.

⁴⁰Benezet, Some Historical Account, p. 127.

natural law (as embodied in the Declaration of Independence), but then showed how deficient it was in applying these "self-evident" truths to "all men [who are] created equal." Citing the position of Congress in 1775 "that it was contrary to the Divine Author of our existence that a part of the human kind should hold an absolute and unbound power over others" ⁴¹ Benezet applied:

Hence it becomes a matter of the utmost weight to the Americans, in a peculiar manner, duly to consider how far they can justify a conduct so abhorrent from these sacred truths as that of dragging these oppressed Strangers from their Native land, and all those tender connections, which we hold so dear; the violence exercised over them, to oblige them to do the servile offices of life, for those whose superiority has been obtained by an illegal force; under the sanction of unjust laws; laws framed to hold in bondage, a bondage often rigorous and cruel, a people over whom they have not the least shadow of right; a bondage without condition, without end, and without appeal. ⁴²

While Benezet opposed slavery on the main fronts of religion and natural law, he made passing reference to the facts that the lack of negro inferiority invalidates the justification of slavery, ⁴³ and economically the institution is not a help to society. ⁴⁴

On all counts, slavery was wrong, and obviously so. He wrestled with the question of how the slave trade, which kept the institution of

⁴¹Benezet, Short Observations on Slave Keeping. This was published in 1782 as an introduction to the extracts of the Abbé Raynal's writings. It is quoted in Brookes, op. cit., pp. 497-500. The above quoted portion is from pp. 497-8, citing Congress, July 6, 1775. (Hereafter referred to as "Short Observations".)

⁴²Ibid., p. 498.

⁴³Benezet, Short Account, p. 78. The final appeal of this tract is that because the negro is not inferior, black slavery is wrong: "Upon the whole . . . it must appear to every honest unprejudiced Reader, that the Negroes are equally intituled [sic] to the common privileges of Mankind with the Whites, that they have the same rational Powers, the same natural Affections, and are as susceptible of Pain and Grief as they, that therefore . . . [and here he elaborates on the fact that slavery is wrong.]"

⁴⁴Benezet, letter to John Wesley, 23 May, 1774, quoted in Brookes, op. cit., p. 318; ". . . where slavery prevails, a poor industrious white man, cannot procure to himself and family a living . . ." In the same letter Benezet expresses the fear that new lands being opened up, from the mouth of the Mississippi to the lake of Canada will become slave areas instead of a refuge.

slavery alive could be so long continued by those in authority: "How an evil of so deep a dye, hath so long, not only passed uninterrupted by those in Power, but hath even had their Countenance, is indeed surprising" ⁴⁵ But, like Granville Sharp, he resolved that those in power "have been unaquainted with the corrupt motives which gives life to it [the slave trade]" ⁴⁶ Otherwise, ". . . the powers of earth would not . . . have so long authorized a practice so inconsistent with every idea of liberty and justice" ⁴⁷

That Benezet was opposed to slavery is clear, but the extent of his opposition can be seen in some of his attitudes toward emancipation. Benezet's extract of Philmore indicates that it is better to pay compensation money to the planters than to keep the slaves in bondage. ⁴⁸ However, in both his Short Account (1762) and Some Historical Account, (1771) Benezet posits his own plan of emancipation. It involved an immediate ending of further slave imports; those already serving as slaves would continue so, only long enough to balance the owners' previous expense (of buying or rearing), after which they would be declared free. They would stay in their respective locales, with overseers to guide them. They would be given tracts of land and their

⁴⁵ Benezet, Caution, p. 4.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid. Cf. Granville Sharp, Representation, pp. 331-340, especially, pp. 333-335.

⁴⁸ Benezet, Short Account, p. 60.

children would be educated.⁴⁹

David Brion Davis responds to Benezet's plan by saying:

Here, one suspects, is the true 'reality' of race: cheerful and willing-minded laborers. The success of emancipation would not depend on the Negro's capacity for liberty, but on finding a substitute for the labor discipline of slavery. 50

However, when seen in the context of all his writings, Benezet's suggestion must be viewed as only a beginning for freedom of negroes, not the final goal. It is more like a temporary arrangement for the transition period, to prepare slaves for freedom rather than a system of a permanent black labour force. Indeed, if the latter were Benezet's idea, it would be hardly different from slavery except that men work by incentive rather than the masters' discipline. Although the plan is not as elaborate as Sharp's (see Chapter V, p. 119) it demonstrates his alternative to the other options of continuing slavery, sending negroes back to Africa or encouraging sudden and unprepared emancipation.⁵¹

It is interesting to note the difference in approach between Sharp and Benezet regarding emancipation plans. Sharp's provided for both

⁴⁹Benezet, Short Account, p. 70-1; Some Historical Account, pp. 139-40. ". . . That all farther importation of slaves be absolutely prohibited; and as to those born amongst us, after serving so long as may appear to be equitable, let them by law be declared free. Let every one thus set free, be enrolled in the county courts, and be obliged to be a resident during a certain number of years within the said county, under the care of the overseers of the poor. Thus being, in some sort, still under the direction of governors and the notice of those who were formerly acquainted with them, they would be obliged to act the more circumspectly, and make proper use of their liberty, and their children would have an opportunity of obtaining such instruction as is necessary to the common occasions of life, and thus both parents and children might gradually become useful members of the community." See also Short Observations (p. 499 in Brookes, op. cit.).

⁵⁰Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823, p. 306.

⁵¹Benezet, Some Historical Account, p. 138.

compensation to the owner and gradual acclimatization of the slave to freedom, by the slave working and paying his owner for increasing free days. On the other hand, Benezet, by 1772, felt it was unthinkable for slaves to purchase their own freedom from their masters:

And as to paying a yearly sum to secure thy estate [freed slaves paying the master], it is the height of injustice; this incumbrance was not brought on by any fault or act of theirs, but by thyself [the slave owner], and as it was of thy own seeking, ought to bear the burden, and not punish innocent persons for thy faults. 52

Benezet went on to compare freeing the negroes in "halves" [some of their time being free, and some the right of the owner] to Ananias and Sapphira trying to deceive the apostles.⁵³ He felt it was a pretence to doing the right thing, without fully doing it. In fact, looking on his previous suggestion (1762) that a slave should be freed after he had served sufficient time to balance the owner's investment, Benezet, in 1772 stated that even if a slave had not earned his keep, in God's justice he should not be kept. Justice to the slave was more important than economic fairness to the owner.⁵⁴

The truth was explicit. The negro deserved his freedom like any other human being, on principles of religion and natural law. Necessity or hardship could not excuse a reticence to act for the cause of justice. Benezet's exhortation in his Observations on Slave Keeping (1772) sums up his opposition to slavery and its bases:

But such who solemnly pretend to condemn the practice, yet shelter themselves under supposed difficulties in setting theirs free, or willing to free them after they have spent the prime of life in their service, or make them pay so much per year to secure their estates, etc.

⁵²Benezet, Slave Keeping, pp. 18-19.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid.

I would beg of such to lay aside the false balance and deceitful weights, and use the true. -- Weight this matter in Christ's scales. 'Do unto others, as ye would they should do to you.' This will oblige you to set your negroes free . . . to deny it to them, is as I said before, a repetition of the crime which brought their ancestors out of their own country, viz. a robbing them of their freedom 55

II

ATTITUDE TOWARD THE IDEA OF NEGRO INFERIORITY

Benezet's attitudes toward the negro race are consistent with his human sensitivity and religious commitment. On Biblical and religious grounds he believed in a spiritual equality. The negro was ". . . equally the work of an Almighty hand, with a soul to save or loose" ⁵⁶ In a letter to Thomas Secker, Archbishop of Canterbury, he referred to ". . . our fellow creatures, equally with us the subjects of Christ's redeeming grace" ⁵⁷ Years earlier (1754), Benezet had grappled with the inconsistency of recognising spiritual equality while denying physical liberty:

Do we consider that they are called, and sincerely desire that they may become heirs with us in glory, and rejoice in the liberty of the sons of God, whilst we are withholding from them the common liberty of mankind? ⁵⁸

He also subscribed to monogenesis, and therefore believed in "the original equality of mankind." ⁵⁹ Drawing again on Philmore he explained

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 13-14.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 19-20. In Short Account Benezet quotes Philmore who states that Africans are "men" and as such, the "offspring" of God, and the "noblest workmanship of his Hands," for whom Christ had died (p. 62).

⁵⁷ Benezet to Thomas Secker, no date, quoted in Brookes, op. cit., p. 273.

⁵⁸ Benezet, Epistle of 1754, (in Brookes, op. cit.) p. 476.

⁵⁹ Benezet, Some Historical Account, p. 65.

that blacks and whites are:

. . . of the same Species, and are originally descended from the same Parents, ----- they have the same rational Powers as we have; they are free moral Agents, as we are, and many of them have as good natural Genius, as good and as brave a Spirit as any of those to whom they are made Slaves. 60

Spiritual equality was a result of monogenesis because of "the impartial eye with which the almighty regards men of every condition, and admits them to a participation on his benefits."⁶¹

Because of original equality and spiritual equality, Benezet saw the negroes as fully equal to the white man, at least in a potential sense. While circumstances had not allowed them to develop as thoroughly, ". . . their Capacity [was] as good, and as capable of Improvement as that of the Whites."⁶² Given the opportunities, the negroes would develop. In fact, he agreed with George Wallace that if:

' . . . the Negroes [were let] free . . . in a few Generations, this vast and fertile Continent [America] would be crowded with Inhabitants; Learning, Arts, and every Thing would flourish amongst them; instead of being inhabited by wild Beasts, and by Savages, it would be people'd by Philosophers, and by Men! 63

This was already demonstrated by ". . . some [slave and free, who have] manifested as much Sagacity and Uprightness of Heart as could have been expected from the Whites, under like Circumstances" ⁶⁴

In basic human factors, the black race was no different from the white; ". . . they have the same rational Powers, the same natural

⁶⁰ Benezet, Short Account, p. 38.

⁶¹ Benezet, Some Historical Account, p. 65.

⁶² Benezet, Short Account, p. 7.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 33, (quoting George Wallace).

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 67.

Affections, and are as susceptible of Pain and Grief as [the whites]
" ⁶⁵ To deny negro equality was either the result of lack of
 exposure to blacks, or the absence of objectivity:

. . . the notion entertained by some that the blacks
 are inferior in their capacities, is a vulgar prejudice
 founded on the pride of ignorance of their lordly masters,
 who have kept their slaves at such a distance, as to be
 unable to form a right judgment of them. ⁶⁶

Benezet went to great lengths to demonstrate this equality by
 examining the African in his native land. Quoting African travellers
 such as Adanson, Bosman, William Smith and Brue he presented the picture
 of the "noble savage," living an easy life because of the land's
 fertility. ⁶⁷ The natives' systems of justice, treatment of the elderly
 and their religions gave evidence against their barbarity. ⁶⁸ Even
 their sexual mores spoke to the point. Here Benezet suggested African
 moral superiority to the Europeans; while the former punished severely
 for adultery, the latter dissolved black marriages at will, or for
 convenience, condoned slaves' cohabitation, and even cohabited with
 slaves. ⁶⁹ Rice suggests that by quoting the African travellers, Benezet
 introduced a new dimension to the entire controversy: empirical evidence.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 78.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Brookes, op. cit., pp. 46-7, (no Benezet source given).

⁶⁷ Benezet, Short Account, pp. 12-18. Anstey indicates that
 Benezet quoted the African travellers in a new way, giving the impression
 that they supported his conclusions. (Anstey, op. cit., p. 216)

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 19-21 deals with the systems of justice; pp. 72-78,
 the respect for and treatment of the aged. On p. 21 Benezet cites the
 Hottentots as the only nation not dealing in slaves. He indicates that
 they have a monotheistic religion, but no specific form of worship.

⁶⁹ Benezet, Some Historical Account, pp. 36-7.

Whereas the argument had been based solely on religion and natural rights, seeing the negro in his natural state, with dignity and worth gave a new perspective to the matter of slavery. Enslaving an equal could not be considered rational. This line of reasoning would be continued by other abolitionists.⁷⁰

While Benezet felt that Africa needed, and would benefit from the Christianising and civilising influence of Europe, unfortunately the wrong Europeans had been doing the influencing. As a result the coastal Africans reflected the corrupting influence of the Europeans:

. . . many Negroes on the sea-coast, who have been corrupted by their intercourse and converse with the European Factors, have learnt to stick at no act of cruelty for gain. 71

Quoting William Smith, Benezet asserts that:

". . . the discerning natives account it their greatest unhappiness that they were ever visited by the Europeans . . . that we Christians introduced the traffick of slaves, and . . . before our coming they lived in peace." 72

These ideas were set forth from 1762. Years later, (1807) William Wilberforce would state the same view, as would Newton.

In contrast, as mentioned above, Thomas Clarkson felt that the Africans could only benefit from interchange with Europe. James Ramsay went even further indicating that without European influence the African culture was, and would remain in total darkness.⁷³ It is interesting to note the continuity of thought (as well as the contrasting thought)

⁷⁰Rice, op. cit., p. 200.

⁷¹Benezet, Caution, p. 24.

⁷²Benezet, Some Historical Account, pp. 59-60. Benezet dates Smith's statement from 1726. The same idea occurs in Caution, p. 18, and Short Account, p. 22.

⁷³See above, pp. 20, 47-8, 63 (and note 31 on p. 63) and 102.

from Benezet to the English abolitionists. While Granville Sharp posited a high view of man it would be interesting to know his views on the comparative levels of African civilisation. His conversionist leanings would speak partially to the issue, but we have no direct references in his works to the inland versus coastal natives, nor do we have references to his evaluation of the early European influences on Africa.

Benezet also realised that a major factor in appraising the negroes was the degradation which slavery effected. Specifically he stated that the harsh treatment the slaves received caused them increasingly to act inferior:

. . . few of them having Hopes of attaining to any condition beyond that of slavery; so that tho' the natural Capacity of many of them be ever so good, yet they have no Inducement or Opportunity of exerting it to any Advantage, which naturally tends to depress their spirits into habits of Idleness and Sloth 74

Even when the slaves were freed, the situation was not drastically improved and the degradation continued because they had ". . . little more opportunity of Knowledge and Improvement than when in Slavery."⁷⁵

To the argument that Europeans only treated them so because they were in fact inferior, Benezet answered that it was not true. The negroes were ". . . indeed, as susceptible of Modesty and Shame as other People" but the Europeans had simply grown accustomed to treating them in so degraded a manner.⁷⁶

⁷⁴Benezet, Short Account, p. 66. Almost the same words are used in Some Historical Account, p. 133.

⁷⁵Benezet, Short Account, p. 67.

⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 27-28.

In a statement that hints of Wilberforce's future elaboration,⁷⁷ Benezet suggested the cycle of degradation. The slave was first treated as if inferior; he then responded in a way commensurate with his treatment, thus reinforcing the initial style of treatment; it was a self-perpetuating cycle. Benezet derived this concept from the Biblical injunction to limit the amount of punishment.⁷⁸ If there were no restraint, the cycle was thus begun:

As this effect soon followed the cause, the cruelest measures were adopted, in order to make the most of the poor wretches labour; and in the minds of the masters such an idea was excited of inferiority in the nature of these their unhappy fellow creatures, that they soon esteemed and treated them as beasts of burden 79

Quoting John Woolman, Benezet also referred to the degradation of the slave owner:

'He that has a servant, made so wrongfully, and knows it to be so, when he treats him otherwise than a free man, when he reaps the benefit of his labour, without paying him . . . These things, though done in calmness, without any show of disorder, do yet deprave the mind'

The effect would carry on to the masters' children, leaving "less room for that which is good."⁸⁰ This concept (degradation of the owner)

⁷⁷ See Chapter I pp. 8-10, 15-19.

⁷⁸ Deuteronomy 25:2-3: "then it shall be if the wicked man deserves to be beaten, the judge shall then make him lie down and be beaten in his presence with the number of stripes according to his guilt. (3) He may beat him forty times but no more, lest he beat him with many more stripes than these, and your brother be degraded in your eyes."

⁷⁹ Benezet, Some Historical Account, pp. 73-4.

⁸⁰ Benezet, Some Historical Account, p. 74, (italics mine). Benezet is quoting John Woolman's Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes, pt. 2, p. 50. Anstey (op. cit., pp. 205, 221) indicates that Woolman's work was written in 1746, but not submitted for publishing until 1754, and not actually published until 1762.

was to be noted later by Thomas Clarkson as well. (See Chapter III, pp. 58-9)

Benezet was all too aware of the significance of assumed negro inferiority as a support for the institution of slavery. He was also cognizant of the reality that often objective fact was less important in shaping behaviour than were long standing attitudes and personal desires:

The power of prejudice over the minds of mankind is very extraordinary; hardly any extremes [sic] too distant, or absurdities too glaring for it to unite or reconcile, if it tends to promote or justify a favourite pursuit. 81

In discussing the problems of overcoming such prejudice he demonstrates unusual insight and apprehends truths that will be relevant to future generations:

The low contempt with which they are generally treated by the whites, lead children from the first dawn of reason, to consider people with a black skin, on a footing with domestic animals, form'd to serve and obey, whom they may kick, beat, and treat as they please, without their having any right to complain; and when they attain the age of maturity, can scarce be brought to believe that creatures they have always looked upon so vastly below themselves, can stand on the same footing in the sight of the Universal Father, or that justice requires the same conduct to them as to whites 82

Thus Benezet realised that prejudices can become "so riveted" that even religious people cannot "hear the voice of impartial justice."⁸³ As a result, his tract Observations on Slave Keeping (1772) is predominantly a treatise against the myths of negro inferiority, dealing with the problems of overcoming a lifetime of prejudice arising from exposure to degraded slaves.

⁸¹Benezet, Slave Keeping, p. 3.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid.

Although he predates the major era of conversionism, Benezet's ideas like those of Sharp, are congruent with those concepts. As with Sharp, we can compare Benezet's attitudes toward negroes to his attitudes toward another non-white group, in this case, the American Indian. His transactions with the Indians reflect the same kind of concern as do his dealings with the negroes. He opposed war against the Indians and even published work relating to the character of the Indian.⁸⁴ His high regard for the Indian is seen in Brookes' description:

. . . no man in that day knew more about the Indians than Friend Anthony Benezet. He attended all the important treaties of that period; he knew intimately and conferred often with Christian Frederick Post, Conrad Weiser, Papunahung, Tedyuscung, and other Indian chiefs; he set aside in his will certain sums as a foundation for the education of Indian children; and he continued to the day of his death to gather information concerning Indian affairs, in order that he might pass on to young and old alike books, pamphlets, and reports, and stimulate their interests and faith in a race who in Benezet's estimation had become 'a squeezed world that elbows for attention.'⁸⁵

Benezet felt that Christians were in no way superior to heathen (of any colour) and in a statement that seems to anticipate and challenge later trusteeship he asserted: "Our being Christians does not give us any worldly superiority, or any authority whatever, over those who are not Christians."⁸⁶ Those who were converted, he treated fully as Christians. Indicative of the mutual high regard between him and other races is the comment of an Indian who related that whereas most white preachers didn't listen but only talked, Benezet actually listened to them.⁸⁷

⁸⁴Brookes, op. cit., pp. 113, 123. (Some Observations on the Situation, Disposition, and character of the Indian Natives of this Continent, 1784).

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 124.

⁸⁶Benezet, Short Account, p. 39.

⁸⁷Brookes, op. cit., pp. 479-85.

To be sure, Benezet did notice differences between Indians and negroes:

. . . the natural disposition of the Generality of the Negroes is widely different from the roving Dispositions of our Indians; they [the negroes] generally settle together, and employ themselves in Agriculture and Commerce. 88

But he felt these differences were incidental, of a cultural nature, and in no way connected with race or equality. When writing his will Benezet simply provided for "the education of Negroes, Mulattos and Indian Children,"⁸⁹ indicating that he saw similar educational needs in each group.

Benezet's interest in educating negroes was not a superficial concern. He had had extensive practical involvement as a teacher and even influenced the establishment of a school for negro children in 1770 (Philadelphia). He taught at this school as well.⁹⁰ If one relates his lengthy experience of teaching negroes to the philosophy of education which Brookes ascribes to him, a specific rationale can be seen. Brookes indicates ". . . that Benezet regarded education as something personal, developing the child from within, quickening as well as informing the understanding"⁹¹ These attitudes are in harmony with conversionism which saw education as part of the larger process of Christianising; the end result of which was cultural, spiritual and intellectual elevation so individuals and groups could realise their full potential. This view assumed (as did Benezet) a basic equality

⁸⁸Benezet, Short Account, p. 72.

⁸⁹Benezet, "The Will of Anthony Benezet", quoted in Brookes, op. cit., p. 166.

⁹⁰Brookes, op. cit., pp. 47-49.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 55.

within, which must be made obvious by the development of abilities. His criteria for those who would teach further reflect this philosophy. Teachers should not be mere academics, but committed Christians with a desire to serve and help children develop spiritually as well as intellectually.⁹²

Throughout his writings Benezet reiterates his wish that the first Europeans who visited Africa had made the Africans ". . . acquainted with the glad tidings of the gospel" ⁹³ instead of dealing in men for financial gain:

If instead of making slaves of the Negroes, the nations who assume the name and character of christians, would use their endeavours to make the nations of Africa acquainted with the nature of the christian religion, to give them a better sense of the true use of the blessings of life, the more beneficial arts and customs would, by degrees, be introduced amongst them; this care probably would produce the same effect upon them, which it has had on the inhabitants of Europe, (formerly as savage and barbarous as the natives of Africa.) ⁹⁴

In 1784 Benezet stated his concern again in conversionist terms:

It would surely have been more consistent with the avowed principles of Englishmen, both as men and as Christians, if their settlement in heathen countries had been succeeded by mild and benevolent attempts to civilize their inhabitants,⁹⁵ and to incline them to receive the glad tidings of the gospel.

⁹²Ibid., p. 166.

⁹³Benezet, Some Historical Account, pp. 96-7. (1771)

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 68.

⁹⁵The Case of our Fellow-Creatures, the Oppressed Africans, respectfully recommended to The Serious Consideration of the Legislature of Great-Britain, By the People called Quakers, (London, 1784). (Hereafter referred to as "The Case of our Fellow-Creatures".) While authorship of this tract has not been proven conclusively, there is sufficient internal evidence to indicate that it was the work of Benezet. The ideas and language are clearly akin to his. Roger Anstey concurs (op. cit., p. 230) and lists it in his bibliography under Benezet's authorship (p. 435). Thousands of copies of this tract were circulated publicly by the London Society of Friends.

In 1781 he wrote the Abbé Raynal indicting most of those who considered themselves Christians. Their lack of vitality and authenticity was made obvious by their failure even to attempt to Christianise the heathen:

Alas! should Christianity, that law of love and charity, work its proper effect on the hearts of its pretended disciples, we would see numbers of Christians traverse Africa, and both the Indies, not to pollute themselves with slavery and slaughter, nor to accumulate wealth, the supreme wish of the present nominal Christians; but that Divine love would impel them to visit remote regions, in order to make the inhabitants acquainted with the corruption of the human heart, and invite them to seek for the influence of that grace, proposed by the gospel, by which they may obtain salvation. 96

Undoubtedly to Benezet, the responsibility of the Christian world was to Christianise and thus civilise the heathen world. Even in 1754 he had exhorted his Quaker brethren to ". . . watch over [their slaves] for good, instructing them in the fear of God and the knowledge of the Gospel of Christ" ⁹⁷ The purpose of this instruction was two-fold, both of which are consistent with the tenets of conversionism: ". . . that they may answer the end of their creation, and God be honored" and if in the future they should be emancipated, ". . . they may be the more capable of making a proper use of their liberty." ⁹⁸

Finally, Benezet saw the negroes as potential settlers for the western lands. Opposed to the idea of sending them back to Africa, he felt that their settling ". . . among the white people . . . would, in all probability, be as profitable to the negroes as to the new settlers." ⁹⁹ In this can be seen Benezet's underlying assumption of

⁹⁶ Benezet, to Abbe Raynal, 16 July, 1781, quoted in Brookes, op. cit., p. 366.

⁹⁷ Benezet, Epistle of 1754, in Brookes, op. cit., p. 477.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Brookes, op. cit., quoting letter from Benezet to John Fothergill, no date or other reference.

racial equality. The differences he observes between whites and negroes are due to the degradation of slavery, or the lack of exposure to Christianity and advanced civilisation. Those differences will disappear, or become insignificant with the spread of Christian culture, which is after all, the duty of true Christians. Benezet's position is seen here to be far different from his contemporaries who subscribed to irrevocable negro inferiority and thus feared contamination by integration (Long and Estwick). Benezet saw integration as the means of Christianising; interchange between the races would be mutually beneficial.

III

MOTIVATION

In perusing the works of Benezet, one consistently senses a singularity and simplicity of motive. The opening sentence of his letter to Queen Charlotte expresses that motive: he acted from ". . . a sense of religious duty" ¹⁰⁰ Benezet was not the researcher that Granville Sharp was. He did not become involved in all the intricacies of original research as Sharp did in both his legal and scriptural searches. Benezet was simply a Christian, deeply committed and unusually sensitive. As such he had an intuitive awareness of the contradiction between Christianity and slavery. He worked to relieve the oppressed and to remove such an unchristian institution from the world.

Benezet's overarching concern was that he should love God and his neighbour. Writing to Granville Sharp in 1772 he referred to the slaves as ". . . our neighbours, whom we are by the Gospel enjoined to

¹⁰⁰ Letter from Benezet to Queen Charlotte, 1783, quoted in Clarkson, History, Vol. I, p. 172.

love as ourselves" ¹⁰¹ Writing to Thomas Secker he confessed to have "no other motive than that of love to mankind" ¹⁰² The same thread can be found in one aspect of his will. While he left money for teaching negro, Indian and mulatto children, as mentioned above, he specified the qualities he desired in the teacher, reflecting the motives of his own teaching career. These were certainly consonant with the love of one's neighbour:

. . . and it is my particular desire founded on the experience I have had in that service that in the choice of such a tutor special care may be had to prefer an industrious careful person of true piety, who may be or become suitably qualified, who would undertake the service from a principal of charity, to one more highly learned not equally so disposed. 103

To love one's neighbour involved more than emotion. It meant actions which would change unfavourable conditions, actions which would improve the lives of his fellow man. Benezet realised the connection between love and application, and was eager to "promote the happiness of all men," ¹⁰⁴ even though this meant great personal sacrifice and conflict with contemporary social forms.

This Christian concern resulted in a general benevolence or Christian humanitarianism. Brookes indicates the breadth:

So many interests held him. He longed for the gradual emancipation of the slaves, he coveted a just and generous treatment of Indians, a way to contentment for the Acadians, he pleaded for sobriety instead of intemperance, peace among all the nations of the earth, and simplicity and modesty in living.

¹⁰¹ Benezet to Sharp, May 14, 1772, quoted in Brookes, op. cit., p. 292.

¹⁰² Benezet to Secker, undated, quoted in Brookes, op. cit., p. 273.

¹⁰³ Benezet's Will, Pemberton Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, quoted in Brookes, p. 159. (*italics mine*)

¹⁰⁴ Benezet to Raynal, July 16, 1781, quoted in Brookes, p. 365.

His benevolence brooded over his home and school; it infused itself into his daily work; it bound him to a multitude of friends and it endeared him to people of different races and languages. 105

It was true. Benezet found himself irresistably drawn to those in need, offering whatever help he could manage. His help covered a variety of situations. When the British took over the formerly French Nova Scotia, the French settlers became homeless and emigrated to America in dire poverty. Benezet raised money for these "Acadians," and cared extensively for their needs.¹⁰⁶ On one occasion he gave his newly purchased blankets to some of them, without his wife's prior knowledge.¹⁰⁷

On Christmas of 1755 the settlers of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania received a threat of Indian attack. Benezet responded by collecting and sending money and clothes. Two weeks later he sent another wagonload, and sixteen days later, a third.¹⁰⁸ The ravages of war also put people in distress (needlessly from Benezet's perspective), and he again reached out to assist.

Regarding the American Indians, he was instrumental in negotiating peace in 1755-56. He opposed the Pennsylvania government declaring war on the Indians in 1756, but his pacifism was consistent as he also opposed the American Revolutionary War. The cost in human suffering and life was too great to be sacrificed to the evils of war.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵Brookes, op. cit., p. 155.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., pp. 60-66. Benezet's concern over the Acadians, stemming from his Christian humanitarianism is reflected in the tract he wrote on their behalf. (Brookes, p. 198.)

¹⁰⁷Brookes, op. cit., p. 73.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 112.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., pp. 112-15, 125. In 1782 Benezet wrote a tract relating to war: The Plainness and Innocent Simplicity of the Christian Religion . . . compared to the . . . Dreadful Effects of War. (38 pages) He also wrote Henry Laurens, president of the Continental Congress, attempting to exert influence against war.

Benezet's strong Christian convictions tied to his many humanitarian actions reveal him to be a kind of crusader saint. Benjamin Rush's description of him is apt:

In one hand he carried a subscription paper and a petition; in the other he carried a small pamphlet on the unlawfulness of the African Slave-Trade, and a letter directed to the king of Prussia upon the unlawfulness of war. 110

But crusader that he was, all his actions were based on his desire to love God and neighbour, the test of which was simply the golden rule.¹¹¹ In fulfilling this principle, Benezet gave his energies both to helping individuals and to altering the social system. While any needy individual did find a ready place in his heart, he also decidedly influenced the larger structures. His method of doing this was to assist and inspire those in influential positions. His work with the Quaker Meetings in Philadelphia and London, his encouragement and guidance of Granville Sharp during the legal battles, and his inspiring Thomas Clarkson demonstrate the point. But these actions seem to be the irrespressible overflow of a compassionate heart rather than the deliberate long-planned steps of a political strategist. Benezet simply could not

¹¹⁰Brookes, op. cit., p. 75, quoting Benjamin Rush, Essays, Literary Moral and Philosophical (Philadelphia, 1806) p. 303.

¹¹¹An interesting example of this principle being his guide is his reflection on helping the Acadians. He wrote to John Smith: "Should thou, or I, meet with an accident . . . in some part where we were not known, and lay in the road unable to help ourselves, and should the proper officers either through prejudice or neglect of duty not take care to relieve us; how should we feel, and what should we think of the neighbours who saw . . . if they should suffer us to perish there for fear of the trouble, or the charge which might fall upon them . . . ? Did the good Samaritan hold himself excused from relieving the wounded traveller . . . ?" (Benezet to John Smith, 1746, Brookes, op. cit., p. 69.)

remain silent in the face of injustice. Regardless of his conscious approach, his writings found their way to those who would influence political decisions.

In light of Benezet's great concern for the afflicted in such a variety of circumstances, his Christian Humanitarianism found its greatest expression in the cause of the slave. He considered himself "called" to the cause of antislavery, but the "calling" would have been viewed in a more general than specific and personal revelatory sense. He was called in the same way every other Christian was called to obey the mandates of the gospel, to put into practice the law of love. Benezet's concept of the church reflects this same spirit. He was more concerned with the practical outworking of one's faith than with creedal statements and theological disputes.¹¹² Thus, Christian brotherhood and fellowship were more important than denominational allegiance:

Though I am joined in church fellowship with the people called Quakers, yet my heart is united in the true gospel fellowship with the willing in God's Israel, let their distinguishing name or sect be as it may. 113

Certainly the overall motivating factor in Benezet's life was his seeing the slave in the context of the command to love one's neighbour. This would make it impossible for the issue to remain distant and theoretical. But under that general head, additional reasons can also be seen. He apparently felt a sense of personal responsibility and accountability. In a letter to Sharp he asserted: "Indeed, we cannot be at the same time

¹¹²Brookes, op. cit., p. 139.

¹¹³Ibid., quoted from "Friends' Miscellany", No. 3, 10th month, 1832. It is likely that Benezet's attitude toward the universal church and denominationalism was related to the fact that he felt the antislavery cause transcended Quakerism. A very interesting contrast is seen in the attitudes of Wesley and Sharp. At best they saw Quakers as misled brothers. Sharp even went to the point of writing Benezet in regard to his heresy (Quakerism), but Benezet died before the work was finished. It was written in 1784, the year of Benezet's death, but not published until 1807.

silent and innocent spectators of the most horrid scene . . . perhaps, ever acted upon the face of the earth."¹¹⁴ If he were to remind others of their accountability and future judgment, he could do no less than he knew was necessary.

Another reason for his antislavery involvement was his strong desire for promoting the faith. Negatively, he felt anything that worked against that purpose must be dealt with, and in 1754 he cautioned his brethren that where slave-keeping prevails, genuine Christianity and morality deteriorate.¹¹⁵ Likewise in 1767 he advised the S.P.G. that the slave trade was the "greatest impediment to the promulgation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in every part where it prevails."¹¹⁶ So, not only was slavery evil in itself, it also was an obstacle in the path of the spread of Christianity; one more reason for its overthrow.

On the positive side, Benezet felt a unique responsibility not only for the welfare of the slaves, but for the spiritual welfare of slave owners. The latter were in danger that would have eternal consequences. This concern is reflected in Benezet's letters to both Wesley and Sharp:

It is certainly incumbent upon every lover of God and man to use their best endeavours to stop this unnatural and barbarous traffic, as well on account of its dreadful effects on the poor negroes . . . but yet much more so in the case of their lordly oppressors, the people of the West India and southern Colonies, to whom this dreadful evil will . . . extend beyond time, even in the regions of eternity, by hardening their hearts, so that they and

¹¹⁴Benezet to Sharp, May 14, 1772, Brookes, op. cit., p. 291.

¹¹⁵Benezet, Epistle of 1754 (quoted in Brookes, p. 475).

¹¹⁶Benezet to the S.P.G., April 26, 1767. (Brookes, op. cit., p. 272) The "impediment" Benezet is referring to is the growing insensitivity that results in those who take part in the slave trade. This attitude is consistent with that of John Woolman.

their offspring become alienated from God, and are hastening to a state of greater and more deeply corrupt barbarity than that from whence our progenitors sprung before their acquaintance with Christianity. 117

Thus for Benezet the slave trade and slavery counteracted the grace of God, preventing its effectual working in the lives of men, especially the "lordly oppressors." The spiritual damage to the white man was itself another sufficient reason for ending the entire system. Benezet seems to be alone in this motive for abolishing slavery and the trade, unless one considers Clarkson's position on the oppression experienced by those who oppress others to be a similar motive.

Clarkson was speaking to the fact that both slave and master experience a form of degradation, but he did not make a strong connection between degradation of the slave owner and its eternal consequences. Benezet's desire to promote the Christian faith would certainly cause him to oppose an institution which prevented the Christian message from taking root. 118

¹¹⁷ Benezet to Sharp, May 14, 1772, (quoted in Brookes, p. 291). To Wesley, Benezet wrote: "But with respect to their lordly oppressor, the horrible abuse of their fellow-creatures, will extend its baneful influence even in the regions of eternity. For such is the depravity and hardness of heart and mind produced by it, that for many, very many of the subjects of it, it may be feared, Christ will have died in vain." (May 23, 1774, quoted in Brookes, op. cit., p. 321)

¹¹⁸ Benezet's strong emphasis on promoting the faith is seen also in the value he placed on instilling Christian perspectives in youth: "I have often thought that, next to preaching of the Gospel, the labour that is bestowed in preventing the influx of evil, and the watching over every opportunity of instilling noble and Christian principles in the tender minds of the youth, is the greatest and most acceptable sacrifice and service we can offer to the great Father" (Benezet to Samuel Fothergill, November 27, 1758, quoted in Brookes, p. 230). Evidence that this value was born out in life is seen both in Benezet's practice and his will. His vocational life was given to educating children, particularly negroes, mulattoes and Indians. The substance of his possession, after caring for his wife, was to go almost entirely to educating the kinds of children he had taught. As noted earlier, his style of education was thoroughly Christian.

Without doubt, Benezet was motivated by his Christian faith. The major admonitions to love one's neighbour and treat others as one desires to be treated provided the foundation, the basic argument against slavery. The feeling of personal accountability and the desire to spread his faith would have provided the impetus. He believed, although naïvely, that fellow Christians would do right, when apprised of it, even as he had not been able to resist the call of the despairing. Thus, he desired to share the facts of slavery so men might then act in accordance with the truth. He saw his work as nothing beyond what any Christian could be expected to do. He simply applied the principles of his faith to the greatest evil of his day. Late in life he was asked how he accounted for his measure of success in the cause, in light of such limited resources. His typically unassuming response reaffirms his quiet but confident Christian motive; success came "by the help of the inspiration of the spirit of the universe of the kind disposition of those to whom I spoke, and of my own good will."¹¹⁹

That he did succeed is obvious from the presence of his lines of argument in the writings of abolitionists on both sides of the Atlantic. In fact, many of these men had become abolitionists partly as a result of Benezet's influence. Undoubtedly, he appeared on the antislavery scene in the "fulness of time." Whether his work was responsible for the tying together of Enlightenment ideas and those of religion, and for the combining of the efforts of Quakers and the rest of the Christian world, are questions that are difficult to resolve fully. But certainly, Benezet's work occurred at that point in time when antislavery forces and ideas were ripe to come together and influence the world. In his approach, the various facets did come together and found expression that

¹¹⁹Brookes, op. cit., p. 109, citing Hilda Justice, The Life and Ancestry of Warner Mifflin, (Philadelphia, 1905) p. 59.

could bridge the denominational and geographical gap. Although many years would pass before final victory, Benezet's work would eventually prove significant in that long desired victory.

CHAPTER VII

JOHN WESLEY

John Wesley almost completely spanned the eighteenth century.

Born in 1703 and living until 1791 his life covered the period which saw the British attitude toward slavery change so radically. As the founder of Methodism, and as one of the most significant leaders of the evangelicals, his views on such a crucial problem as slavery are important.

A number of sources shed light on Wesley's attitudes toward slavery and the Slave Trade. These include his journal, mentioning specific incidents and his responses, his correspondence, his tracts and sermons with their references to and implications for slavery, one sermon dealing with slavery (no longer extant), and his antislavery tract, "Thoughts Upon Slavery." In this tract are found Wesley's most concise and direct views on slavery and thus it will be dealt with in greater detail. It should be noted that this section will be limited to Wesley's direct comments on slavery. His implicit views, contained in his theology will be covered in Chapter VIII.

Brief Overview of Wesley's interaction with the Problem of Slavery

1726, Wesley read Thomas Southerne's play, Oronooko, based on Aphra Behn's novel, Oronoko. The book is a romantic treatment of an African prince who is kidnapped into slavery. It decries this unjust treatment of nobility, but not the institution of slavery.¹

1735, Wesley set out for America, as a missionary. Jakobsson indicates that one of his desires was to serve among the negro slaves.²

¹Coupland, The British Anti-Slavery Movement, p. 41.
See also C. Duncan Rice, The Rise and Fall of Black Slavery, p. 181.

²Stiv Jakobsson, Am I Not A Man And A Brother? (Uppsula, 1972) p. 274. See note 114 below (this Chapter).

1736-1738, in America Wesley had contact with slavery. On occasion he had opportunity to teach slaves.³ He supported Oglethorpe in the non-slavery policy enforced in the Georgia colony.⁴ Mercer comments that during this time "Wesley learned of the general resistance to the social concern of the 'prophet', particularly when he mixed his concern over the slave trade and the liquor industry with his preaching."⁵ An interesting description of John and Charles Wesleys' early opposition to slavery suggests that it may not have fallen on deaf ears:

Both Wesleys spoke out fearlessly against the evils of the slave traffic, then at its height in the Carolina Colony. To them it was a horror indescribable. It is a significant fact, but one not generally known, that the people of this same Frederica, where the Wesleys laboured, and where, despite persecution, their opinions were fearlessly expressed with reference to this barter of human flesh, were the signers of the first protest in the history of America against the introduction of slavery. This was in 1749

³ John Wesley, The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., ed, Thomas Jackson, Third Edition, 14 vols., (London, 1872), Vol. I, Journal, p. 48 (April 23, 1737), p. 49 (May 27, 1737). See also, pp. 40, 70, 72. Hereafter referred to as "Wesley, Works," and unless otherwise noted, all references in this study will be to the 1872 Jackson edition.

⁴ John Wesley, The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., ed. Nehemiah Curnock, Standard Edition, 8 vols., (London, 1909-1916) Vol. I, p. 244, n. Here is indicated Wesley's opposition to the introduction of slavery in Georgia, in contrast to one Dr. Tailfer who strongly desired slavery to be allowed there. Wesley's position on slavery was only one factor evoking Tailfer's hostility towards him. It seems that Wesley had discovered Tailfer's previous immoral behaviour, and confronted him in Oglethorpe's presence (Nov. 12, 1736). See also Maldwyn Edwards, John Wesley and the Eighteenth Century, (London, 1955), pp. 118-19.

⁵ Jerry Lee Mercer, "A Study of the Concept of Man in the Sermons of John Wesley," (unpublished Th.D. thesis, Claremont School of Theology, 1970), p. 136.

How much of this feeling against negro slavery was due to the teaching of the Wesleys is a most interesting question.⁶

1755-1757, Wesley's concern for the American negro continued after

his return to Britain. Correspondence with the Rev. Samuel Davies indicates that Wesley sent him religious books (including hymns and psalms) to be distributed to the slaves and poor whites.⁷

1757, In his lengthy treatise on Original Sin, Wesley quoted a

Dr. Jennings (Jenning's Vindication) who supported the theory that slavery was a result of the curse of Ham.⁸ Wesley did not question this interpretation, but simply used it as an analogy for how all men "suffer . . . by the sentence inflicted on our first parents."⁹

⁶ A. M. Barnes, Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, Hereafter referred to as "WHS Proceedings." Vol. XVI, p. 61. Charles Wesley's abhorrent reaction to slavery during this period is seen in his journal:

"I had observed much, and heard more, of the cruelty of masters towards their negroes; but now I received an authentic account of some horrid instances thereof. The giving a child a slave of its own age to tyrannize over, to beat and abuse out of sport, was, I myself saw a common practice. Nor is it strange, being thus trained up in cruelty, they should afterwards arrive at so great perfection in it; that Mr. Star, a gentleman I often met at Mr. Lasserre's, should, as he himself informed L., first nail up a negro by the ears, then order him to be whipped in the severest manner, and then to have scalding water thrown over him, so that the poor creature could not stir for four months after. Another much applauded punishment is, drawing their slaves' teeth. One Colonel Lynch is universally known to have cut off a poor negro's legs; and to kill several of them every year by his barbarities.

It were endless to recount all the shocking instances of diabolical cruelty which these men (as they call themselves) daily practise upon their fellow-creatures; and that on the most trivial occasions. I shall only mention one more, related to me by a Swiss gentleman, Mr. Zouberbuhler, an eye-witness, of Mr. Hill, a dancing-master in Charlestown. He whipped a she-slave so long, that she fell down at his feet for dead. When, by the help of a physician, she was so far recovered as to show signs of life, he repeated the whipping with equal rigour, and concluded with dropping hot sealing-wax upon her flesh. Her crime was overfilling a tea-cup." (The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A., ed. Thomas Jackson, 2 vols. / London, 1849 / Vol. I, pp. 36-7)

⁷ Wesley, Works, Vol. II (Journal) pp. 337-8, 354-6, 392.

⁸ Wesley, Works, Vol. IX ("The Doctrine of Original Sin") p. 234.

⁹ Ibid.

1758, At Nathaniel Gilbert's house, Wandsworth, Wesley preached and noted the "awakening" of two of Gilbert's "servants."¹⁰ Ten months later Wesley went again to Wandsworth and "baptized two negroes belonging to Mr. Gilbert."¹¹ Both Andrews and Norwood note that no protest to slavery was registered by Wesley at these times.¹² While it is true that Gilbert never freed his slaves, it is also true that as chairman of the Antigua Assembly, he was the friend of the slave, and as such was not honoured by the Assembly, upon his resignation.¹³ In 1760 Gilbert began preaching, with the result that fourteen years later, at his death, there were some 200 Methodists, white and black in Antigua.¹⁴ Perhaps Wesley's influence had led, if not to their emancipation, at least to the amelioration of the slaves' conditions. It should further be noted that Gilbert was likewise a correspondent of Anthony Benezet.¹⁵

¹⁰Ibid., Vol. II (Journal) p. 433. (17 January, 1758).

¹¹Ibid., p.464 (29 November, 1758).

¹²Stuart Andrews, Methodism and Society, (London, 1970) p. 52; Andrews says: "In 1760 Wesley baptised a slave-holder and two of his slaves without recording any protest." In fact, according to the Journal, the baptisms occurred in 1758, and did not include the "slave-holder", Mr. Gilbert.

See also John Nelson Norwood, The Schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church: 1844, (New York, 1923), p. 15. Norwood indicates that both Gilbert and "two of his slaves" were baptised by Wesley. Had Wesley in fact baptised Gilbert, some sort of protest may have been in order, but the Journal does not indicate Gilbert's baptism. It was two years later that Gilbert began preaching, and sixteen years later that Wesley published his tract against slavery. Gilbert died before being able to read it.

¹³Jakobsson, op. cit., p. 276, also Edgar Thompson, Nathaniel Gilbert, (London, 1960) p. 24.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Frank Baker, The Relations Between the Society of Friends and Early Methodism (London, 1949, reprinted from the London Quarterly and Holborn Review), p. 22. (note continued, p. 195)

1772, In February, Wesley read Anthony Benezet's Some Historical

Account.¹⁶ It appears that this was the experience that crystallized Wesley's outlook on slavery. From this point he took a strong and overt stand against slavery and the slave trade. Baker comments:

Immediately he became Benezet's ally in this great campaign, and a month or two later Benezet wrote to Granville Sharp: 'My friend John Wesley promises he will consult with thee about the expediency of some weekly publications in the newspaper, on the origin, nature, and dreadful effects of the slave trade.'¹⁷

1774, Wesley published his major tract against slavery and the slave trade: "Thoughts Upon Slavery". This was done instead of the "weekly publications" which Benezet mentioned.

1777, Wesley preached at Liverpool, the strong slave trade port.

(Footnote 15 continued from page 194)

R. Butterworth, "Anthony Benezet", in WHS Proceedings, Vol. V. p. 45. Butterworth indicates that Benezet corresponded with "Nathaniel Gilbert of Antigua, and George Whitefield, who was his guest in 1740."

Butterworth also cites a letter from Wesley to Benezet: "Mr. Oglethorpe, you know, went so far as to begin settling a colony without negroes; but at length the voice of those villains prevailed who sell their country and their God for gold, who laugh at human nature and compassion, and defy all religion, but that of getting money. It is certainly our duty to do all in our power to check this growing evil, and something may be done by spreading these tracts which place it in a true light. But I fear it will not be stopped till all the kingdoms of this earth become the kingdoms of our God." n.d.

¹⁶ Wesley, Works, Vol. III (Journal) p. 453 (12 Feb., 1772).

¹⁷ Baker, op. cit., p. 22. It would be a mistake however, to cite this (1772) as the time of Wesley's significant action in the cause. Rather, it was the beginning of his campaign. In a misunderstanding of these facts, Swaney (Charles Swaney, Episcopal Methodism and Slavery, Boston, 1926, p. 1) says "fifteen years before Clarkson, Wilberforce and Granville Sharp undertook to destroy slavery within the British possession, Wesley had formed a 'Society for the Suppression of the Slave Trade.'" The date Swaney is referring to is 1772, but in fact, he has simply misquoted his source (A New History of Methodism, eds. Townsend, Workman and Eayrs, Vol. I, p. 370 [London, 1909]): "Wesley moved against it [the slave trade] fifteen years before . . . [the forming of] the Society for the Suppression of the Slave Trade."

In his journal he comments that "the men-butchers have now nothing to do" because the slave trade has been interrupted by the war with America.¹⁸

1786, The Minutes of the Methodist Conference, 1786 include: "Antigua, J. Baxter, William Warrener."¹⁹ Thomas Coke had worked hard to secure the appointment of a Methodist preacher to the West Indies, to work with the negroes. Now, with Wesley's support, Warrener was appointed. It was the first time a preacher had been appointed by Conference to be a missionary to heathen people.²⁰ This is significant because earlier "missionaries" (such as those sent by the S.P.G.) had been sent to minister to their fellow countrymen, not the heathen.

1788, Wesley preached in Bristol on the topic of slavery. On Tuesday, 4th March he publicised that he would be preaching on the topic, Thursday. The event proved to be extraordinary. In Wesley's own words:

. . . the House from end to end was filled with high and low, rich and poor. I preached on that ancient prophecy, 'God shall enlarge Japhet. And he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.' About the middle of the discourse, while there was on every side attention still as night, a vehement noise arose, none could tell why, and shot like lightning through the whole congregation. The terror and confusion were inexpressible. You might have imagined it was a city taken by storm. The people rushed upon each other with the utmost violence; the benches were broke in pieces; and nine-tenths of the congregation appeared to be struck with the same panic. In about six minutes the

¹⁸ Wesley, Works, Vol. IV (Journal) pp. 95-6 (April 14, 1777).

¹⁹ Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Vol. I, 1744-1798, (London, 1862), p. 187.

²⁰ F. Deaville Walker, WHS Proceedings, Vol. XX, pp. 154-158, Walker relates the interesting story of discovering in 1935 a tract written by Coke in 1786. Wesley's prefatory letter to Coke's tract is found in The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., ed. Telford, Standard edition, 8 vols., (London, 1931) Vol. VII, p.332 (hereafter referred to as "Letters").

storm ceased, almost as suddenly as it rose; and, all being calm, I went on without the least interruption.

It was the strangest incident of the kind I ever remember; and I believe none can account for it, without supposing some preternatural influence. Satan²¹ fought, lest his kingdom should be delivered up.

How revealing it would be to have a text of that sermon! Unfortunately, it seems not to have been published and no manuscript appears to be extant. Rupert Davies suggests that since the sermon was preached near the time of the reprinting (1788) of Wesley's Thoughts Upon Slavery, ". . . it seems probable that the sermon followed the same lines as the Thoughts, and did not need to be published."²²

Wesley's correspondence from 1774 to 1791 reveals his intensified interest and involvement in antislavery. In September of 1774 the "Monthly Review" commented favourably on Wesley's Thoughts Upon Slavery.²³ Two months later Wesley wrote the editors giving further evidence of the inhumanity of slavery, particularly American slavery. He quoted two American newspaper advertisements which had been sent to him by Benezet. In each the slaveowners offered higher rewards for the severed heads of runaway slaves than for the slaves' live return.²⁴

In 1783 it appears that one Captain Richard Williams had written some material on slavery, and sent it to Wesley for perusal. Wesley first told Williams through a friend that he would consider it.²⁵ In November

²¹ Wesley, Works, Vol. IV (Journal), p. 408, (March 3, 4 & 6, 1788)

²² Rupert E. Davies, personal correspondence with the author, 21 August, 1981.

²³ "Monthly Review", September, 1774, Vol. LI, p. 234.

²⁴ Wesley, Letters, Vol. VI, p. 126. Wesley's letter is dated November 30, 1774; his source was a letter he received from Benezet, dated May 23, 1774. (Benezet's letter is quoted in Brookes, op. cit., p. 105)

²⁵ Wesley, Letters, Vol. VII, p. 168. February 25, 1783 to Joseph Taylor.

he commented: "I think the lines on Slavery will do well! They are both sensible and poetical."²⁶ By December Wesley reported that he had sent the material on to the General Post, but he cautioned Williams that the editors tended to print mainly that which sold papers.²⁷

The peak of Wesley's antislavery interest appears to have occurred in 1787-88, the period which saw the formation of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. After being informed by Clarkson of the forming of the Committee, and its purpose, Wesley expressed strong support and mentioned his long time desire for negro freedom. He referred to the individual work of his American friends who had already begun emancipating slaves, but indicated that he realised much more needed to be done, and the work of the Committee would be requisite.²⁸ He offered:

What little I can do to promote this excellent work I shall do with pleasure. I will print a large edition of the tract I wrote some years since, Thoughts Upon Slavery, and send it . . . to all my friends in Great Britain and Ireland; adding a few words in favour of your design 29

By November 24, only three months later, he had fulfilled his promise.³⁰ The following year (1788) he printed in the Arminian Magazine, the resolutions, in full, of an antislavery meeting held in Manchester. In addition to condemning both slavery and the slave trade, this meeting

²⁶ Ibid., p. 195, to Captain Richard Williams, November 9, 1783.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 201-2, to Captain Richard Williams, December 10, 1783.

²⁸ Ibid., Vol. VIII, pp. 275-6, to Samuel Hoare, August 18, 1787.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 276, to Samuel Hoare, August 18, 1787.

³⁰ Ibid., p.23, to Thomas Funnell, November 24, 1787.

gave both verbal and financial support to the London Antislavery Society.³¹

A second letter to the Committee, via Granville Sharp reveals that Wesley had read what the Committee had published, and "cannot but do everything in my power to forward the glorious design of your Society."³² Further he cautioned them in two areas: to realise the persuasive appeal of "interest" over humanity, and to be beyond reproach in their "manner of procuring witnesses."³³ This latter concern was soon dismissed when Wesley learned that only the "expenses" of witnesses were paid, which of course was "liable to no objection."³⁴ Within half a year of his numerous letters to members of the Antislavery Committee (August to November, 1787), Wesley preached his eventful Bristol sermon on slavery.

Wesley's interest did not vanish. In 1790 he still asserted "I would do anything that is in my power toward the extirpation of that trade which is a scandal not only to Christianity but humanity."³⁵ By this time Wesley was in his last year, a man of eighty-seven. But perhaps his most famous letter is that which he wrote the following year, only days before his death; To William Wilberforce:

Balam, February 24, 1791

Dear Sir, Unless the divine power has raised you up to be as Athanasius contra mundum, I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villany,

³¹The Arminian Magazine, Vol. XI, pp. 208-9, 1788. ("Resolutions of the Society for the purpose of effecting the abolition of the Slave Trade.")

³²Wesley, Letters, Vol. VIII, pp. 16-17 to Granville Sharp, October 11, 1787.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., p. 207. To Henry Moore, March 14, 1790.

which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of His might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.

Reading this morning a tract wrote by a poor African [life of Gustavus Vassa], I was particularly struck by that circumstance, that a man who has a black skin, being wronged or outraged by a white man, can have no redress; it being a law in all our Colonies that the oath of a black against a white goes for nothing. What villany is this!

That He who has guided you from youth up may continue to strengthen you in this and all things is the prayer of, dear sir,

Your affectionate servant.³⁶

I

ATTITUDE TOWARD SLAVERY

A brief perusal of Wesley's slavery-related correspondence and journal entries quickly indicates that he was strongly opposed to the abuses of slavery, many of which were brought on by the slave trade and the "men-butchers" who continued it. When dealing with the abuses, Wesley's violent opposition comes through clearly in his emotion-laden descriptions. Indeed, Ramsay commented that had he read Wesley's tract before writing his own, he would have "written in a more warm and decisive manner."³⁷ However, Wesley was equally opposed to the institution of slavery, but on the basis of well reasoned principles. In light of all his writings, his quoting of Jennings's "Curse of Ham" justification of

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 264-5. In the 1870, June 22 edition of The Watchman, appears a letter to the editor by George J. Stevenson. Stevenson indicates that the Wilberforce letter was in fact Wesley's last. Following this letter is a confirmation note by Thurnley Smith. [June 22, 1870 Watchman discovered in loose leaf form, top shelf of safe, Wesley Chapel, July, 1981.]

³⁷ Folarin, James Ramsay, The Unknown Abolitionist, p. 89. quoting a letter from Captain J. S. Smith, p. 21n., in the British Library, Add MMS 21254, fol. 14.

slavery (see above, n. 8) is probably for Wesley not so much a rationalisation for the institution as an explanation of its origins. Its "providential" origins for Wesley would in no way modify the expedience of its extirpation.

For Wesley's mature views on slavery and the slave trade, and a concise presentation of them, we must look closely at his "Thoughts Upon Slavery." Edwards calls it "a careful argument" and an "eloquent plea."³⁸ It appears that Sharp was helpful to Wesley in the writing.

In a letter to Benezet, Sharp recalls:

Some time ago the Revd. Westley [sic] signified to me by letter, that he had a desire to write against the Slave Trade; in consequence of which I furnished him with a large bundle of Books and Papers on the Subject; and a few days ago he sent me his Manuscript to peruse; which is well drawn up, and he has reduced the substance of the Argument respecting the gross iniquity of that Trade, into a very small Compass: his Evidence, however, seems chiefly extracted from the Authors quoted in your several publications. 39

Following the writing of Wesley's tract, Sharp responded personally, both commenting approvingly on the text and suggesting a form for publishing.⁴⁰ Following publication, Sharp sent two copies to

³⁸ Edwards, op. cit., p. 117.

³⁹ Anstey, The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition 1760-1810, p. 240, quoting Sharp Transcripts (J.A.W.) Sharp to Benezet, (January 7, 1774). In fact, a bit more than the first half of Wesley's tract depends heavily on Benezet (Some Historical Account), but the rest is characteristically Wesley. After citing the background and facts found in Benezet, he makes his own application and strong appeal to those directly involved with slave ownership or slave dealing. For a comment on Wesley's use of others' material [plagiarism?] see appendix III.

⁴⁰ "Rev^d Sir, I have perused, with great satisfaction, your little Tract against Slavery, and am far from thinking any alteration is necessary: You have very judiciously brought together and digested, under proper heads of Evidence against that abominable oppression, some of the principal Facts cited by my Friend Mr. Benezet and others; which you corroborate with some circumstances within your own knowledge; and have very sensibly drawn up the Sum of the whole argument into a small compass, which infinitely increases the power and effect of it, like Light collected in a Focus; and that it may be as sensibly felt with a living Flame by those who inconsiderately oppose themselves, is the sincere wish of

Rev^d Sir, Your most obedient and obliged Servant,

Granville Sharp.

Benjamin Rush.⁴¹ Benezet was well enough pleased with the tract that he sent a copy to William Dillwyn and had it reprinted in America.⁴² To Wesley, Benezet wrote that the Thoughts "afforded me much satisfaction" and mentioned that he would have it republished.⁴³

In England, Wesley's Thoughts reached three editions in 1774. A fourth was published in 1775, and a fifth in 1792.⁴⁴ It received favourable reviews in the Journal and the Gentleman's Magazine.⁴⁵ A copy even found its place among the 354 books of George Washington's library.⁴⁶ It was also sent to every Methodist Society in England.⁴⁷

(Footnote 40 continued from page 201)

P.S. I apprehend, as the Tract is short, that it will appear to most advantage in 12^{mo} but with respect to the mode of communicating it, I am at a loss to advise. A New Edition of Dr. Rushes little Tract is about to be printed by Dilly in the Poultry, with other Papers relating to the same subject, which collection would be greatly enriched by your Tract: nevertheless the latter will certainly have much more weight with many persons if it be separately printed and published with your name."

(This letter is used by permission of Dr. Dairmaid MacCulloch, Wesley College Library, fo. 314; part of a collection in a bound volume made by Mary Ann Smith, daughter of Adam Clarke. Although undated, the letter is datable to early 1774.)

⁴¹Brookes, op. cit., p. 447. Sharp to Rush, February 21, 1774: "I have also sent you two copies of Mr. Westley's [-sic] Tract ag't. Slavery, mentioned in my last letter to Mr. Benezet"

⁴²Ibid., pp. 381-2; pp. 396-7. Benezet to John Pemberton, 1783.

⁴³Ibid., p. 85. Benezet to Wesley, May 23, 1774.

⁴⁴The 1st, 3rd, 4th and 5th editions are available in the John Rylands University Library, Manchester.

⁴⁵The Journal, in Monthly Review, September 1774, Vol. LI, p. 234. Gentleman's Magazine, March 1775, Vol. XLV, p. 157.

⁴⁶John S. Simon, WHS Proceedings, Vol. XIII, p. 1. Simon quotes the Zion's Herald, September 1, 1920 "Browsing Around George Washington's Library" (no author). Among the books were the following Wesley sermons; "The Great Assize", "Salvation by Faith", "The Almost Christian", "Original Sin", "The Important Question" (Matt. 16:26) and the tract "Thoughts Upon Slavery". The library is currently located on the 4th floor of the Boston Athenaeum Library.

⁴⁷William Ernest Sweetland, "A Critical Study of John Wesley as Practical Thinker and Reformer", (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Michigan, 1955), p. 110. Also, Wesley's Letters Vol. VIII, p. 277, to Samuel Hoare, August 18, 1787.

In his "Thoughts Upon Slavery", Wesley clearly defined his position. In this section we shall look closely at his bases for opposition to slavery in "Thoughts", but refer as well to passages in other works where applicable. Wesley opposed slavery predominantly on the basis of natural law. He also argued against it from the points of "necessity", economics, religion and the degradation it effected.

Although normally Wesley would not have been considered a defender of natural rights and natural law, where slavery was concerned, he leaned heavily upon the argument from natural rights.⁴⁸ He asserted:

. . . waving, for the present all other consideration, I strike at the root of this complicated villany; I absolutely deny all slave-holding to be consistent with any degree of natural justice. 49

He supported this claim with the argument of Blackstone, who had reasoned against Justinian's three justifications for slavery (captivity in war, selling of oneself, and inherited slavery).⁵⁰ He concluded:

It cannot be, that either war, or contract, can give any man such a property in another as he has in his sheep and oxen. Much less is it possible, that any child of man should ever be born a slave. Liberty is the right of every human creature . . . which he derives from the law of nature. 51

⁴⁸ Bernard Semmel, The Methodist Revolution, (London, 1973), p. 95.

⁴⁹ Wesley, Works, Vol. XI ("Thoughts Upon Slavery"), p. 70.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Blackstone's argument is found in his Commentaries on the Laws of England, 3rd ed. Vol. I, b.i, ch. xiv, pp. 423-24. Granville Sharp also cites this Blackstone argument in his Representation (1769) pp. 141-42. Blackstone was for a time of the opinion that slavery itself was not legal in England. But when Sharp researched this he discovered that later editions of Commentaries had omitted that opinion. (Lascelles, Granville Sharp and the Freedom of the Slaves in England, p. 22) However, all editions contain Blackstone's refutation of Justinian.

⁵¹ Wesley, Works, Vol. XI ("Thought Upon Slavery"), p. 79. (italics mine)

And, although Wesley was ordinarily a staunch defender of civil law, this too changed when human law conflicted with natural law. So, it mattered not that slavery had been "legalized", it was still wrong:

The grand plea is, 'They are authorized to procure and hold slaves by law.' But can law, human law, change the nature of things? Can it turn darkness into light, or evil into good? By no means. Notwithstanding ten thousand laws, right is right, and wrong is wrong still. There must still remain an essential difference between justice and injustice, cruelty and mercy. So that I still ask, Who can reconcile this treatment of the Negroes, first and last, with either mercy or justice? 52

Wesley's view of natural rights can be seen in his comments on liberty written before he wrote the tract on slavery. In his "Thoughts Upon Liberty" (1772) he posited that "all men in the world desire liberty . . . by a natural instinct" ⁵³ Further, "every man living, as man, has a right to this, as he is a rational creature. The creator gave him this right when he endowed him with understanding." ⁵⁴ The liberty referred to is specifically religious liberty, "a liberty to choose our own religion, to worship God according to our own conscience, according to the best light we have," ⁵⁵ and in general, civil liberty, "liberty to enjoy our lives and fortunes in our own way; to use our property, whatever is legally our own, according to our own choice." ⁵⁶ Part of Wesley's rationale was the fact of accountability,

⁵²Ibid., p. 70. This statement has almost certainly been adapted from Benezet, (Some Historical Account, 1771, pp. 131-32). It was likewise used by Sharp in his Appendix to the Representation against Slavery, (1772), pp. 25-26. See Chapter V (Sharp), p. 113, note 25.

⁵³Wesley, Works, Vol. XI, p. 34.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 37.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 41.

as "every man must judge for himself, because every man must give an account of himself to God."⁵⁷ Thus he called this liberty "indefeasible", or "unalienable" and stated that "God did never give authority to any man, or number of men, to deprive any child of man thereof, under any colour or pretense whatever."⁵⁸

It must be pointed out that in the above comments on liberty, Wesley was not addressing the issue of slavery, but speaking to his fellow Englishmen who were crying out for more liberty. He was attempting to explain what liberty was, and convince them that they certainly had it in England. At the same time, his statements laid the groundwork for his later statements on slavery, wherein a man had no civil liberty as Wesley defined it (even the right to his own body, which was certainly his property), or religious liberty.

In his "Calm Address to our American Colonies" (1775, based on Johnson's Taxation No Tyranny) Wesley strongly indicted those Americans who pleaded for "liberty"; he insisted that they already had full religious and civil liberty.⁵⁹ While they described taxation with representation as "slavery", Wesley accused them of imposing slavery on those who disagreed with them and spoke against Congress or for the King.⁶⁰ He further

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 37.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 37-8; see also Wesley's "Observations on Liberty", (1776) Works, XI, p. 92.

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 80-90. "A Calm Address to Our American Colonies".

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 136 ("Calm Address to the Inhabitants of England") It is instructive to note that some of Wesley's references to "slavery" are of this sort, and do not refer to negro slavery, but have been mistaken to so relate. For example, Sweetland, (op. cit., p. 161) uses the following quote to demonstrate Wesley's exposure of American hypocrisy; crying for liberty while defending negro slavery: "Do you observe, wherever these bawlers for liberty govern, there is the vilest slavery?" (Works, XI, p. 136) In fact, Wesley is here not referring to negro slavery but to the political slavery Americans imposed on those who supported the Crown. On other occasions, however, Wesley does point out the hypocrisy of American negro slavery and the ideal of liberty.

pointed out the inconsistency of pleading for liberty and calling British policy "slavery", when in fact the Americans had genuine slavery near at hand:

See that Negro, fainting under the load, bleeding under the lash! He is a slave. And is there 'no difference' between him and his master? Yes, the one is screaming, 'Murder! Slavery!' the other silently bleeds and dies! 61

He then showed the contrast: to "go where we will, and enjoy the fruit of our labours: This is liberty. The Negro does not: This is slavery."⁶²

It should be further pointed out that what Wesley meant by "liberty" was of a rather limited sort. Beyond religious and civil liberty, his view was restricted. He opposed self-government in contrast to government by the laws of the country. Man had "no right at all to be independent, or governed only by himself; but is in duty bound to be governed by the powers that be, according to the laws of the country."⁶³ Those powers were contained within a constitutional monarchy, which gave those in authority the responsibility to uphold the law. But even the law was subject to the common understanding of rightness and justice, as true law came from higher law, not the people, and would always be consistent with rightness.⁶⁴ So, Wesley's idea of liberty was limited so as not to include self-government. It was not limited to the extent of Benezet's view, wherein the individual was only free to do good, not evil. Wesley supported total freedom within the just law.

Thus, Wesley's view of liberty (political) reflects a perspective on Natural Rights that was totally inconsistent with negro slavery.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 81 ("Calm Address to Our American Colonies")

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid., p. 97 ("Observations on Liberty" 1776).

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 97 and p. 70.

The principles he espoused, while not "democratic", left no place for one man to be the property of another, or to be totally under the authority of another. In his "Thoughts Upon Slavery", all those principles and foundations came to bear on the institution of slavery and Wesley clearly stated his view that natural law unquestionably made slavery wrong. As with Granville Sharp, it is interesting to see an evangelical who was also a proponent of natural law, albeit in Wesley's case, a selective proponent, particularly where slavery was concerned.

In addition to natural rights, Wesley also opposed slavery on the basis on "necessity", or pragmatism. For him the end did not justify the means, but he was quick to realise how this philosophy could justify slavery in the minds of the people, and how it could be utilised by the proponents of slavery:

Here also the slave-holder fixes his foot; here he rests the strength of his cause. 'If it is not quite right, yet it must be so; there is an absolute necessity for it. It is necessary we should procure slaves; and when we have procured them, it is necessary to use them with severity⁶⁵

His response to such logic:

. . . You stumble at the threshold; I deny villany is ever necessary. It is impossible that it should ever be necessary for any reasonable creature to violate all the laws of justice, mercy, and truth. No circumstances can make it necessary for a man to burst in sunder all the ties of humanity. 66

Wesley then developed his point further, consonant with his own philosophy of riches. He agreed that perhaps slavery was necessary to riches:

⁶⁵ Wesley, Works, Vol. XI ("Thoughts Upon Slavery"), p. 72.

⁶⁶ Ibid. This "anti-pragmatism" position was consistent with Wesley. In his Sermon on the Mount Discourse II (published 1771) he decried those Christians "that convert sinners by burning them alive!" (Works, Vol. V, p. 277) thus taking a hard position against the crusaders and those who dealt harshly with heretics.

But how is this necessary? It is very possible you might be both a better and a happier man, if you had not a quarter of it. I deny that your gaining one thousand [pounds] is necessary either to your present or eternal happiness. 67

And the same point was taken in regard to the wealth of England as a nation: ". . . wealth is not necessary to the glory of any nation; but wisdom, virtue, justice, mercy, generosity, public spirit, love of our country."⁶⁸ Certainly the qualities he mentioned were in sharp contrast to slavery.

Closely related to necessity, Wesley opposed slavery also on the basis of economics. He believed that England's economy would not be hurt if she had nothing to do with "that detestable trade of man-stealing" and even if "there was not a Negro in all our islands, or in all English America."⁶⁹ From his experience in Georgia he asserted that white men could work as well as black men in that climate, a claim that the planter class denied.⁷⁰ But even if slave labour were necessary:

Better no trade, than trade procured by villany. It is far better to have no wealth, than to gain wealth at the expense of virtue. Better is honest poverty, than all the riches bought by the tears, and sweat, and blood, of our fellow-creatures. 71

⁶⁷ Wesley, Works, Vol. XI, p. 72.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 73.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid. In fact, George Whitefield held the planters' opinion: ". . . that Georgia never can or will be a flourishing province without negroes" (Arnold Dallimore, George Whitefield, Vol. II, [Edinburgh, 1980] p. 367; Letter to the Trustees of Georgia, December, 1748). In 1751 Whitefield wrote Wesley expressing the same opinion: ". . . it is plain to a demonstration that hot countries cannot be cultivated without Negroes." (David D. Thompson, John Wesley as a Social Reformer, [New York, 1898] p. 44. Letter to Wesley, March 22, 1751).

⁷¹ Wesley, Works, Vol. XI, p. 74.

Four years later (1778) Wesley made a similar comment in response to the allegation that England had lost her Negro trade.⁷² For him, the economic question was not nearly so important as the moral, but he realised that it was important to the people and the leaders. In 1787 he reminded the Abolition Committee that if they were to succeed they would need to address themselves to the "interest" aspect of slavery. In a letter to Granville Sharp he indicated that those who opposed abolition, "men who are not encumbered with either honour, conscience, or humanity," would do anything to "secure their great goddess, Interest." Thus, the profit aspect of slavery must be challenged because "this has the weight of a thousand arguments with the generality of men." He advised: "After all, I doubt [*i.e.*, suspect] the matter will turn upon this, 'Is the Slave Trade for the interest of the nation?'"⁷³

⁷²Ibid., p. 145 ("A Serious Address to the People of England, With Regard to the State of the Nation" 1778) "I would to God it may never be found more [*the* Negro trade]! that we may never more steal and sell our brethren like beasts; never murder them by thousands and tens of thousands! O may this worse than Mahometan, worse than Pagan, abomination, be removed from us forever! Never was anything such a reproach to England since it was a nation, as the having any hand in this execrable traffic."

The first edition only of this address carries a post script as well that deals with the trade: "With respect indeed to the Trade of our West-Indian Islands, you may grant, it is greatly decreased. The Planters there cannot carry on their Trade - of buying the Bodies and Souls of Men. God grant, (for the honour of our Country and Religion!) that they may never be able to carry it on more! The total, final destruction of this horrid Trade, would rejoice every Lover of Mankind: Yea, tho' all our Sugar-Islands (so the inhabitants escaped) were swallowed up in the depth of the sea. Certain it is, that England may not only subsist, but abundantly prosper without them: - may increase in Population, Agriculture, Manufactures, and all the other Articles above-mentioned, tho' we no more suck the blood and devour the flesh of the less barbarous Africans. O Earth, hide not thou their blood, and no more cover the stain!" (from first edition, John Rylands University Library, Manchester).

⁷³John Wesley to Granville Sharp, October 11, 1787, Letters. Vol. VIII, pp. 16-17. The Arminian Magazine (Vol. XI, 1788, pp. 437-9) argued extensively that slavery worked against the material interests of England, even pointing out how the slave trade increased French commercial competition with the British.

Years later, the first major Parliamentary victory of the abolitionists (the ending of the foreign slave trade, 1806) pivoted on this very issue. The abolitionists who had tried to convince on the grounds of humanity, had adopted a tactical strategy: profit. It has been suggested that this 1806 victory paved the way for the abolition of the total British slave trade in 1807.

It is interesting that Wesley did not build a scriptural case against slavery. Semmel comments that "Wesley, who was so ready to produce scriptural arguments on all other occasions, had none to offer in his "Thoughts on Slavery" in 1774."⁷⁴ For Wesley, religion was so obviously opposed to both slavery and the slave trade that it is likely he felt it would have been superfluous to deal scripturally with such an apparent evil. He did not believe scripture condoned slavery and regarding the questionable book of Philemon, like Sharp he suggested that Philemon pardoned and freed Onesimus.⁷⁵ It was not until fourteen years later that Raymund Harris published his scriptural defence of the slave trade. It appears that Wesley felt Christians could not possibly be involved in such a gross evil, and to present a Christian case to

⁷⁴Semmel, op. cit., p. 95. Anstey, op. cit., p. 186 n. also observes that Wesley ". . . does not ground his strong denunciation of slavery on Scripture but principally on an appeal to justice and liberty, mercy and compassion."

⁷⁵John Wesley, Explanatory Notes Upon The New Testament, (London, 1831), hereafter referred to as "Notes", introduction to Philemon. (no pagination in Notes) For Sharp's view on Philemon, see Chapter V, p. 137. Regarding Paul's advice in Ephesians 6:5 ("Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh"), Wesley comments about the last phrase "according to the present state of things: afterward, the servant is free from his master." And the Titus 2:9 passage urging "bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything," Wesley tempers "Please them in all things -- wherein it can be done without sin," thus indicating a higher allegiance than slavery allows.

non-Christians would be irrelevant. So, his appeal was broader than "Christian", it was "human" as he challenged:

Are you a man? Then you should have an human heart.
But have you indeed? What is your heart made of?
Is there no such principle as compassion there? Do
you never feel another's pain? Have you no sympathy,
no sense of human woe, no pity for the miserable?
When you saw the flowing eyes, the heaving breasts, or
the bleeding sides and tortured limbs of your fellow-
creatures, was you a stone, or a brute? Did you look
upon them with the eyes of a tiger? 76

In spite of this, in Wesley's thinking, religion was the super-structure for his principles, particularly those related to natural rights. At the close of his tract he reminded the reader of the golden rule, which for Wesley was integral to any definition of true religion. Earlier in the tract he confronted the reader with the contradiction of the infinite worth of God's creation, and the degraded life slavery imposed.⁷⁷ And, of course the plea that "slave-holding is utterly inconsistent with mercy"⁷⁸ was again based on religion, specifically, the golden rule.

Finally, related to man's infinite worth, Wesley based his opposition to slavery on the reality of degradation. When negroes were described in barbaric terms, Wesley laid the blame squarely upon slavery. Like Benezet, he proposed a cycle of degradation which perpetuated the system by degrading blacks, and then justified slavery because the blacks were degraded:

⁷⁶ Wesley, Works, Vol. XI, p. 77 ("Thoughts Upon Slavery")
In a similar closing passage he challenges: "Be not more savage than a lion or a bear!" (p. 79)

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 68.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 71.

You first acted the villain in making them slaves, whether you stole them or bought them. You kept them stupid and wicked, by cutting them off from all opportunities of improvement either in knowledge or virtue: And now you assign their want of wisdom or goodness as the reason for using them worse than brute beasts. 79

As seen throughout this study, this argument, well stated by Wesley, was later used by Wilberforce, Clarkson and Ramsay.⁸⁰ It is likely that the idea began with Benezet, and then filtered through him and Wesley, as well as Sharp.

Further, Wesley posited the reciprocal nature of this degradation. to treat a fellow human being as slavery necessitated, required that the owner be degraded. Harsh words, but "It can never be necessary for a rational being to sink himself below a brute. A man can be under no necessity of degrading himself into a wolf."⁸¹ Again, the concept may well have come from Benezet, but it was further developed by Clarkson.⁸² It was one more obvious reason why slavery was wrong.

An indicator of the degree of Wesley's opposition to slavery can be seen in his attitude toward slave rebellion. Of the men covered in this study, Clarkson alone commented sympathically on slave rebellion. Even Wilberforce saw this attitude as far too radical.⁸³ Wesley defined rebelling as "asserting their native liberty, which they have as much right to as to the air they breathe."⁸⁴ He then asked those who severely

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 75. See Chapter VI (Benezet) pp. 175-6.

⁸⁰See Chapter I (Wilberforce), pp. 8-10, 15-19; Chapter III (Clarkson), p. 58, and Chapter IV (Ramsay), pp. 87-8.

⁸¹Wesley, Works, Vol. XI, p. 72.

⁸²See Chapter VI (Benezet), pp. 176-7, and Chapter III (Clarkson), pp. 58-9.

⁸³See Chapter III (Clarkson), p. 57.

⁸⁴Wesley, Works, Vol. XI, p. 68. See also Thomas William Madron, "The Political Thought of John Wesley", (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Tulane University 1965), p. 115.

punished slaves (the lawmakers) for this "most natural act of 'running away'", what punishment they should expect hereafter.⁸⁵

Wesley's opposition to slavery and the slave trade was thorough and integral. There was no justification for it, and he would describe it as it was, leaving no room for doubt:

. . . One principle sin of our nation is, the blood we have shed in Asia, Africa and America.

. . . however extensively pursued, and of long continuance, the African trade may be, it is nevertheless iniquitous from first to last. It is the price of blood! It is a trade of blood, and has stained our land with blood! 86

It becomes extremely interesting - and revealing - to compare Wesley to some of his contemporaries. One of the sharpest contrasts is observable between Wesley and Whitefield. While Whitefield was a friend of Anthony Benezet, and spoke out against the abuses of slavery,⁸⁷ he was not in the least opposed to the institution itself. In fact, in 1748 he wrote the Trustees for the colony of Georgia expressing his desire for the introduction of slaves there.⁸⁸ A letter written to

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 69.

⁸⁶ Wesley, Works, Vol. XI ("A Seasonable Address to the Inhabitants of Great Britain" 1776) p. 125.

⁸⁷ Benezet spoke highly of Whitefield's plea for better treatment of slaves, although he was aware of Whitefield's acceptance of slavery. Whitefield did quote scripture against the harsh treatment of slaves, assuring God's vengeance for such unchristian abuse. He even quoted the famous Montesquieu satire on negroes not being men, or slaveowners not being Christians. Whitefield's letter to the inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia and the Carolinas was printed in 1739, and quoted in Benezet's Caution, pp. 12-15. Clarkson also praised Whitefield for his attack on the abuses of slavery, but made no comment on his acceptance of the institution.

⁸⁸ Arnold Dallimore, George Whitefield, Vol. I (Edinburgh, 1970) and Vol. II. See: Vol. I pp. 208, 482-3, 295-8, 588n; Vol. II, pp. 368.

Wesley by Whitefield in 1751 graphically illustrates the differing views of the two men, particularly in regard to the institution of slavery, the effect of climate on race, and the pragmatic approach to the issue:

Reverend and Very Dear Sir: Thanks be to God that the time for favoring the colony of Georgia seems to be come. Now is the season for us to exert our utmost for the good of the poor Ethiopians. We are told that even they are soon to stretch out their hands to God; and who knows but their being settled in Georgia may be overruled for this great end? As for the lawfulness of keeping slaves, I have no doubt, since I hear of some that were bought with Abraham's money and some that were born in his house. I also cannot help thinking that some of those servants mentioned by the apostles in their epistles were, or had been, slaves. It is plain that the Gibeonites were doomed to perpetual slavery; and, though liberty is a sweet thing to such as are born free, yet to those who never knew the sweets of it slavery, perhaps, may not be so irksome. However this be, it is plain to a demonstration that hot countries cannot be cultivated without Negroes. What a flourishing country might Georgia have been had the use of them been permitted years ago! How many white people have been destroyed for want of them, and how many thousands of pounds spent to no purpose at all! Though it is true that they are brought in a wrong way from their own country, and it is a trade not to be approved of, yet, as it will be carried on whether we will or not, I should think myself highly favored if I could purchase a good number of them in order to make their lives comfortable, and lay a foundation for breeding up their posterity in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. I had no hand in bringing them into Georgia, though my judgment was for it, and I strongly importuned thereto; yet I would not have a Negro upon my plantation till the use of them was publicly allowed by the colony. Now this is done, let us diligently improve the present opportunity for their instruction. It rejoiced my soul to hear that one of my poor Negroes in Carolina was made a brother in Christ. How know we but we may have many such instances in Georgia! I trust many of them will be brought to Jesus, and this consideration, as to us, swallows up all temporal inconveniences whatsoever.

I am, etc.,

George Whitefield. 89

Whitefield did in fact become a slave owner, and by the time of his death, owned some seventy-five slaves, who were bequeathed to

⁸⁹ George Whitefield to John Wesley, March 22, 1751, cited by Thompson, John Wesley as a Social Reformer, pp. 43-45.

Lady Huntingdon.⁹⁰ What a stark contrast: while Wesley called slave owners "the spring that puts all the rest [slave trade and atrocities] in motion,"⁹¹ Whitefield was a slave owner, and with the intent of helping others, particularly the negroes, by converting them. (Cf. Chapter IV, Ramsay, pp. 89-90, note 42.)

A less dramatic contrast, but one that shows the gradual development of concessions toward slavery can be seen among the early leaders of American Methodism. Asbury's early (1779) Journal entries indicate his strong desire for emancipation.⁹² Thomas Coke was equally opposed to slavery. 1784 saw the organisational meeting of American Methodism in the "Christmas Conference." Here the preachers debated the question:

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 45. See also Clarkson, History I, p. 171 where he indicates that after Whitefield's death, Benezet wrote Lady Huntingdon advising her of the fact that slaveowning was encouraging the slave trade. According to Lecky, Lady Huntingdon had sent Whitefield money for the purpose of purchasing slaves (History of England in the Eighteenth Century, 3 vols. [London, 1892] Vol. III, p. 102).

⁹¹Wesley, Works, Vol. XI, p. 78.

⁹²Frank Baker, From Wesley to Asbury, (Durham, North Carolina, 1976) pp. 121-22; n. Baker cites Asbury's Journal: Feb. 23, March 27, and April 23, 1779: "I have lately been impressed with a deep concern for bringing about the freedom of slaves in America, and feel resolved to do what I can to promote it. If God in His providence hath detained me in this country to be instrumental in so merciful and great an undertaking, I hope He will give me wisdom and courage sufficient, and enable me to give Him all the glory. I am strongly persuaded that if the Methodists will not yield on this point and emancipate their slaves, God will depart from them . . . I have just finished my feeble performance against slavery; if our conference should come into the measure, I trust it will be one of the means toward generally expelling the practice from our Society. How would my heart rejoice if my detention in these parts should afford me leisure in any measure in so desirable a work . . . I was employed according [to] the desire of the conference in preparing a circular letter, to promote the emancipation of slaves, and to be read in our Societies."

"What methods can we take to extirpate slavery?"⁹³ The rules in the Discipline of 1785 "aimed at the complete emancipation of Black slaves."⁹⁴ However, a terrific reaction occurred within Methodism. Antislavery leaders such as Coke and Asbury were threatened and persecuted. Even more disconcerting, slave owners began to prevent the ministers from having access to their slaves.⁹⁵ Within six months of the Christmas Conference, the rules on slavery were suspended.⁹⁶ Baker comments that "the complete emancipation of Black slaves . . . proved such a disruptive issue that it seemed likely to hinder the major task of building up the church."⁹⁷ The soul-searching examination and final modification of church policy is described by Norwood:

Bishop Asbury was much grieved at the increased difficulty of access to the negroes. The position of the church on slavery made the slaveholders fear the effects of its teachings on the blacks. Brooding over this matter, and seeing the increased numbers the church might enroll if it had freer access to the slaves, the bishop confided to his diary the query whether it would not have been better to work for the amelioration of the condition of the slave rather than for his emancipation. He doubted if society was ready for the latter. It certainly was ready for the former. With misgivings like these finding lodgment in the mind of the staunch old anti-slavery bishop, we need not wonder so much at the general decline of radical anti-slavery feeling. 98

⁹³William B. Gravely, "Early Methodism and Slavery: the Roots of a Tradition," in Wesleyan Quarterly Review, 1965, Vol. 2, (May), p. 87.

⁹⁴Baker, From Wesley to Asbury, pp. 151-2.

⁹⁵Davis, The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture, p. 388; See also Baker, From Wesley to Asbury, pp. 151-2.

⁹⁶Gravely, op. cit., p. 87.

⁹⁷Baker, From Wesley to Asbury, p. 121.

⁹⁸Norwood, The Schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church: 1844, p. 20.

It is Gravely's view that the American Methodist Church "in dealing with slavery moved from frustrated attempts to extirpate the evil as a social institution in American life (1784-1800) to a zealous humanitarian concern for the condition and welfare of slaves within the system of slavery (1800-1828)."⁹⁹

The circumstances in England were quite different from those in America. Two years before Wesley wrote his Thoughts Upon Slavery Sharp's success in the Somerset case made slavery illegal in England. However, it is interesting to project (though impossible to know) Wesley's position had he been in Asbury's place. Realising the risk of being overly critical of Asbury and prejudiced in Wesley's favour, we can still infer his probable position. Two factors shed light on the question: Wesley was a strongly authoritarian leader, never yielding to public pressure, and seldom to the pressure of his own preachers. Also, as discussed earlier, he was not swayed by the pragmatic evaluation of an issue, particularly where a moral principle was at stake.

⁹⁹Gravely, op. cit., p. 85. The development of American Methodism's attitude toward slavery, is beyond the scope of the present study. It is interesting to note, however, the immense shift from an initial opposition comparable to Wesley's, to a concessionary acceptance that would trigger the Wesleyan Methodist separation in 1843, and then the split of the main denomination in 1844/45. The reader is referred to William B. Gravely, "Early Methodism and Slavery: The Roots of a Tradition" in Wesleyan Quarterly Review, Vol. 2, May, 1965, pp. 84-100 for a thorough but brief study of the attitudinal change in Methodism to 1828. For studies that carry on into the separations, see: Charles Elliott, History of the Great Secession from the Methodist Episcopal Church in the year 1845 (Cincinnati, 1855); Lucius C. Matlack, The History of the American Slavery and Methodism from 1780 to 1849 (New York, 1849) and The Anti-Slavery Struggle and Triumph in the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York, 1881); John Nelson Norwood, The Schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church: 1844.

An excellent recent study is: Donald G. Mathews, Slavery and Methodism (Princeton, 1965).

It is likely that he would not have tolerated a weakened position against slavery. If a firm stand would have been at the expense of numerical growth, it is likely that he would have opted for a smaller but purer group, as in his days of the very restricted "Holy Club" in Oxford. In later years (1789) this value was still held and is seen in his concern over Methodists' behaviour. In response to those who were not giving generously to help the needy Wesley reflected:

" . . . I many times doubt whether we Preachers are not, in some measure, partakers of their sin."¹⁰⁰ He goes on:

I doubt whether it is not a great sin to keep them in our society. May it not hurt their souls, by encouraging them to persevere in walking contrary to the Bible? And may it not, in some measure, intercept the salutary influences of the blessed Spirit upon the whole community? 101

He then suggests what he should have done and said in regard to standards and membership in the society:

I might have said peremptorily and expressly, 'Here I am: I and my Bible. I will not, I dare not, vary from this book, either in great things or small. I have no power to dispense with one jot or tittle of what is contained therein. I am determined to be a Bible Christian, not almost, but altogether. Who will meet me on this ground? Join me on this, or not at all.' 102

He applies this principle to the matter of dress and feels that he should have been as firm as the Quakers, and said: "If you join us, you are to dress as we do; but you need not join us, unless you please."¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Wesley, Works, Vol. VII, p. 287 (Sermon CXVI, "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity").

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., italics mine.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 288.

If this was Wesley's response to such innocuous sins as extravagance in dress, and restricted giving, it is not difficult to predict his reaction to members who were personally involved in the "sum of all villanies." While he said: "Better no trade, than trade procured by villany,"¹⁰⁴ he may well have responded to Asbury's concessions with: "better no Methodist growth, than growth procured by compromise with villany!" Perhaps it was Wesley's desire to have a good Methodist example against slavery that caused him to persist in requesting Freeborn Garrettson to send his Journals.¹⁰⁵ The example would be clear: the conversion of the slave owner brings emancipation to his slaves.¹⁰⁶

Finally, citing such evangelicals as Newton, Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards, Davis states that "Revivalism did not lead automatically to pleas for emancipation."¹⁰⁷ In general this is true, however for Wesley, one of the prime movers of the eighteenth century Revival, the principles of social concern and social justice were inherent in

¹⁰⁴Ibid., Vol. XI, ("Thoughts Upon Slavery") p. 74.

¹⁰⁵Garrettson, who had inherited a plantation and slaves, emancipated all his slaves after his conversion. His Journal indicates that he did this purely from "that same blessed voice which had spoken to me before" and not because he had read or heard anything against slavery. (See Nathan Bangs, The Life of the Rev. Freeborn Garrettson, [New York, 1829] pp. 33-35). From 1785 until 1790 Wesley requested Garrettson to send his Journals. From numerous difficulties including Garrettson's slowness to respond and one dispatch being lost at sea, Wesley never received them before his death. See Wesley, Works, Vol. XIII (Letters) pp. 70-74.

¹⁰⁶In fairness it should be pointed out that the English Methodists did not face the opposition which the American Methodists did on slavery. Warner takes the position that if they had, they likewise would have been "forced to compromise." (W. J. Warner, The Wesleyan Movement in the Industrial Revolution [London, 1930], p. 247). However, the author does not concur with Warner in this judgment.

¹⁰⁷Davis, The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture, p. 387.

his religion. He was consistently opposed to that "execrable trade", and the "sum of all villanies", the institution of slavery. Never did he condone it. While his antislavery action increased with his awareness (from 1772), his opposition was based on the same principles that motivated his "Revivalism". In Chapters VIII and IX we shall examine the relationship of Wesley's antislavery to his theology.

II

ATTITUDE TOWARD THE IDEA OF NEGRO INFERIORITY

In general terms it was Wesley's teaching and personal desire to "honour all men," and to "love all men."¹⁰⁸ In his preaching he admonished equality of attitude to all, because "the lowest and the worst have a claim to our courtesy."¹⁰⁹ He defined "Christian zeal" as "the flame of love," and it therefore was opposed to hatred:¹¹⁰

If zeal be only fervent love, then it stands at the utmost distance from prejudice, jealousy, evil-sur-mising; seeing 'love thinketh no evil.' Then bigotry of every sort, and, above all, the spirit of persecution, are totally inconsistent with it.

As all these are the works of the devil, let them . . . no longer deceive the unwary children of God.¹¹¹

Indeed, on occasion Wesley quoted from Prior's Solomon (ii, 242), "Love, like death, makes all distinctions void,"¹¹² and the complaint was even voiced by higher society that the Methodists were "perpetually

¹⁰⁸ Wesley, Works, Vol. VII, p. 145 (Sermon C, "On Pleasing All Men").

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 62 (Sermon XCII "On Zeal").

¹¹¹ Ibid. (*italics*, Wesley's)

¹¹² Wesley, Letters, Vol. V, pp. 127, 333 (to Mrs. Woodhouse, February 15, 1769, and to Jane Salkeld, August 9, 1772, respectively.)

endeavoring [sic] to level all ranks and do away with all distinctions."¹¹³

But what of Wesley's specific attitude toward Negroes? It may be well to trace briefly his contact with them in order to establish some ground for his observations and attitudes. The Journal indicates that during his stay in America (1736-7) he had several opportunities to visit with or teach negroes. He comments on their ignorance of Christianity and also on their desire and ability to learn. He expresses interest in teaching them more and even suggests a plan of regular instruction for plantation slaves.¹¹⁴ The return voyage to England finds Wesley busily teaching two negro lads about Christianity.¹¹⁵

Years later correspondence from one Reverend Samuel Davies (in America) indicates that Wesley had sent him books for distribution among

¹¹³Lecky reports this comment having been made following a Methodist service at Lady Huntingdon's (History of England in the Eighteenth Century, Vol. III, p. 122). Edwards (John Wesley and the 18th Century, p. 194) cites the same incident, as does Madron ("The Political Thought of John Wesley", p. 117). Madron mistakenly states that the Methodist preacher was John Wesley, whereas in fact, it was Whitefield. However, it was the "Methodists" in general who were accused of doing "away with all distinctions," thus the accusation would certainly fit Wesley, and in fact, regarding social equality, more aptly fit Wesley than Whitefield.

¹¹⁴Wesley, Works, Vol. I (Journal) p. 40 (31 August, 1736), p. 48, (23 April, 1737), p. 49 (27 May, 1737). Baker even states that because of John's and Charles' concern for evangelising negroes, "the Blacks were indirectly responsible for bringing the Wesleys to America." (Baker, From Wesley to Asbury, p. 3). However, while conversion of the negroes may have been an early goal of those who recruited Wesley and his Holy Club to go to Georgia, Wesley's writings reveal a concern simply for the "heathen." In a preparatory letter to Wesley, John Burton (of the S.P.G.) mentioned work with the slaves in Purryburg (Wesley, Journal, Vol. VIII, p. 287n. [Curnock Edition]). But Wesley's reply of October 10, 1735 refers to "heathen" only, and not slaves (Ibid., p. 290). It is well known that one of Wesley's primary reasons for going to America was to evangelise the Indians.

¹¹⁵Ibid., pp. 70, 72 (26 December, 1737, and 7 January, 1738).

negroes.¹¹⁶ Wesley's printing Davies' letters in his Journal reflects both his concern for Christianising and educating the negroes, and his desire that his preachers be aware of this. In this matter Wesley's attitude differs greatly from that of the planter class, who would often tolerate slaves' conversion but were consistently opposed to slaves' education.

In 1758 Wesley himself baptised two of Mr. Gilbert's negroes having ministered to them earlier and noting their responsiveness.¹¹⁷ Years later, the Journal entry for 3 March, 1786 records again: "baptized a young negro."¹¹⁸ The Journal for 1780 even indicates the presence of a negro in the "select society." Upon visiting that society, Wesley's response is interesting:

I was particularly pleased with a poor Negro. She seemed to be fuller of love than any of the rest. And not only her voice had an unusual sweetness, but her words were chose and uttered with a peculiar propriety. I never heard, either in England or America, such a Negro speaker (man or woman) before.¹¹⁹

While all these contacts with negroes are positive, either in reflecting their capability or their interest, it is interesting to note the contrast to Wesley's interaction with American Indians. Before meeting

¹¹⁶ Ibid. Vol. II, pp. 337-338; 354-356; 392. The last letter indicates that Davies had baptised nearly 150 adult negroes, 60 of which were communicants. Davies was not one of Wesley's preachers, but a Presbyterian.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 433 (January, 1758); 464 (December, 1758). One of these Wesley calls "the first African Christian I have known."

¹¹⁸ Ibid., Vol IV, p. 327.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 180. Madron states that "Wesley took Negroes into his societies throughout his life." (Thomas W. Madron, "John Wesley on Race: A Christian View of Equality", Methodist History II /new series/, July, 1964, p. 26.) While this may be the case, in the Journals negroes are only mentioned with reference to being taught or baptised. The above reference is the only specific mention of a negro in a select society.

the Indians Wesley held the popular Rousseau view of the "noble savage." He saw them as "little children, humble, willing to learn, and eager to do the will of God."¹²⁰ However, just prior to leaving America he recorded: "neither had I as yet, found or heard of any Indians on the continent of America who had the least desire of being instructed."¹²¹ Indeed, of the Georgian Indians he would later record:

They are likewise all, except, perhaps, the Choctaws, gluttons, drunkards, thieves, dissemblers, liars. They are implacable, unmerciful; murderers of fathers, murderers of mothers, murderers of their own children¹²²

It is important to observe this contrast because in later works, when Wesley refers to "heathen," he then means anyone not exposed to Christian civilisation, including native Africans and American Indians.

In his writing, Negroes and "heathen" tend to come into Wesley's scope when he addresses one of two issues: the results of original sin, or slavery. How he describes the negro or heathen is fully dependent upon which of those topics he is addressing. When demonstrating the results of original sin, that man is totally depraved, he points to the depths to which man can go, and typically illustrates this by discussing the "heathen," painting an extremely negative picture. In his "Doctrine of Original Sin," he describes the African's knowledge of metaphysics, math and astronomy as equal to "their four-footed brethren."¹²³

¹²⁰ Wesley, Letters, Vol. I, p. 188.

¹²¹ Wesley, Works, Vol. I, (Journal, 7 October, 1737) p. 59.

¹²² Ibid., p. 66. This same description is used again by Wesley in his discourse on Original Sin. See Works, Vol. IX, p. 212. It is particularly interesting that in the same work he suggests that the American Indians have a "stronger understanding" and "less savage temper" than the natives of Africa (pp. 209-10).

¹²³ Wesley, Works, Vol. IX ("Doctrine of Original Sin") p. 209.

Their knowledge of government is "inferior to a herd of elephants."¹²⁴
 Their common knowledge in matters such as housing, food and shelter
 is far below that of the English, and in the general heading of virtue
 he comments:

As to mercy, they know not what it means, being
 continually cutting each other's throats, from
 generation to generation, and selling for slaves
 as many of those who fall into their hands
 Justice have they none every man
 does what is right in his own eyes, till a stronger
 than he beats out his brains for so doing. 125

Thirty-two years later, he speaks of ". . . heathens of the
 basest sort; many of them inferior to the beasts of the field."¹²⁶
 Specifically addressing the idyllic view of the African he states:

It is true, a celebrated writer (Lady Mary Wortley Montague)
 gives a very different character of them. With the finest
 flow of words, in the most elegant language, she labours
 to wash the AEthiop white. She represents them as many
 degrees above the Christians; as some of the most amiable
 people in the world; as possessed of all the sound virtues;
 as some of the most accomplished of men. But I can in no
 wise receive her report: I cannot rely upon her authority. ¹²⁷

But when illustrating the low estate of man, Wesley did not stop
 with the Africans or Indians. Indeed, their description served as a
 springboard to evil closer to home:

. . . many called Christians are far worse than the
 Heathens that surround them; more profligate, more
 abandoned to all manner of wickedness; neither fearing
 God, nor regarding man! 128

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵Ibid., pp. 209-10. American Indians are given comparable
 treatment, pp. 210-12.

¹²⁶Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 278 (Sermon LXIII "The General Spread of
 the Gospel" published in the second series of sermons, 1788).

¹²⁷Ibid.

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 346.

In his sermon on the "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity" (1789), he asks: "Why are the generality of the people, in all these places /England, Ireland, specifically, London, Bristol and Dublin⁷, Heathens still? no better than the Heathens of Africa or America, either in their tempers or in their lives?"¹²⁹ The conditions of primitive peoples, as well as the behaviour of countries which would be called civilised and Christian, served well to support the doctrine of original sin.

On the other hand, when dealing with the problem of slavery, Wesley paints a much different picture of the Africans. In his "Thoughts Upon Slavery" he quotes very idyllic accounts of the negroes and their country.¹³⁰ He summarises their character and ability thus:

Upon the whole, therefore the Negroes who inhabit the coast of Africa, from the river Senegal to the southern bounds of Angola, are so far from being the stupid, senseless, brutish lazy barbarians, the fierce, cruel, perfidious savages they have been described, that, on the contrary, they are represented, by them who have no motive to flatter them, as remarkably sensible, considering the few advantages they have for improving their understanding; as industrious to the highest degree, perhaps more so than any other natives of so warm a climate; as fair, just, and honest in all their dealings 131

¹²⁹ Ibid., Vol. VII, p. 285. For another statement demonstrating the equal depravity of Englishmen, to that of American Indians, see Sermon XXXVIII ("A Caution Against Bigotry"), Works, Vol. V, p. 482. (First series, published, 1771)

¹³⁰ Ibid., Vol. XI, pp. 63-66, 74, 76, 78. Quoting one Allanson (Adanson, from Benezet's Some Historical Account) he relates: "'Which way soever I turned my eyes, I beheld a perfect image of pure nature: An agreeable solitude bounded on every side by a charming landscape; the rural situation of cottages in the midst of trees; the ease and quietness of the Negroes, reclined under the shade of the spreading foliage, with the simplicity of their dress and manners: The whole revived in my mind the idea of our first parents, and I seemed to contemplate the world in its primitive state.'" (p. 63, "Thoughts Upon Slavery")

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 64 ("Thoughts Upon Slavery").

In fact, so glowing were his reports that one reader challenged his use of exaggerated accounts. In the Monthly Review, September, 1774 appears not only a favourable review of Wesley's "Thoughts Upon Slavery", but also an unfavourable review of Reynell's pamphlet which ridiculed Wesley and his argument for the negro. The Review defended Wesley, even if he may have "quoted two exaggerated accounts of Africa."¹³² Following Wesley's argument, the Review states that Reynell "overlooks the only question he ought to have discussed," which is "that the tyrannic dominion we assume over them is either consistent with religion or humanity."¹³³

In the actual review of "Thoughts Upon Slavery," the Monthly Review had observed the widely differing views concerning negroes posited by Wesley and "the author of the History of Jamaica lately published." But the editors assumed differences in the writers' intentions, and explain: "they probably copied the one from the fairest, and the other from the foulest originals. Mr. Wesley is however supported by our knowledge of human nature, which is never backward in the full use of excessive power."¹³⁴ Likewise, the differing views of the Africans within Wesley's own writings could be attributed to his varying intentions, as well as which accounts he had been exposed to when writing.

It should also be noted that even Anthony Benezet cautioned Wesley in overgeneralising about some of the Africans. He writes ". . . in thy mention of the several Negro-Nations who occupy that part of Guinea . . . thou givest a character of the nation of Fulys . . . which . . . is only applicable to a part of that nation"¹³⁵

¹³² Monthly Review, Vol. 51, 1774, p. 237.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 236.

¹³⁵ Anthony Benezet to John Wesley, 23 May, 1774; quoted from The Arminian Magazine, Vol. X, 1787, p. 45.

However, it must be pointed out that occasionally, even when not fighting slavery, Wesley suggests a high view of "heathens" or Africans. In his Sermon on the Mount (published, 1771) he notes that "the heathen has far the pre-eminence" at not laying up treasures on earth.¹³⁶ Even as early as 1741 (remarkably close to his comments on the American Indian), he speaks of "heathen honesty," which "many of them actually practised:"¹³⁷

The common Heathens allowed, that some regard was to be paid to truth, as well as to justice.

There was a sort of love and assistance which they expected one from another. . . . feeding the hungry, if they had food to spare; clothing the naked with their own superfluous raiment; and, in general, the giving, to any that needed, such things as they needed not themselves. Thus far, in the lowest account of it, heathen honesty went 138

Thus, Wesley's view of the Africans and the heathen was not totally consistent. The side of primitive life was always presented which would best illustrate the point he was trying to establish.¹³⁹ Further, his use of the term "heathen" was seldom clearly defined, so it could in fact refer to native Africans, native Americans, or even highly civilised men who lived before the advent of Christianity. And in reference to the fact that Wesley's comments about negroes are usually limited either to his fight against slavery or teaching of original sin, it can be seen

¹³⁶ Wesley, Works, Vol. V, p. 365 (Sermon XXVIII "Sermon on the Mount, discourse VIII").

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 17 (Sermon II, "The Almost Christian").

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

¹³⁹ It should be noted that Margaret Hodgen concurs that Wesley had a low view of Africans when dealing with Original Sin, and a high view, when fighting slavery. However, she does not observe that there were times besides his anti-slavery appeal, in which Wesley posits a high view of heathen. See M. T. Hodgen "The Negro in the Anthropology of John Wesley," Journal of Negro History, Vol. XIX, July (1934) pp. 308-323.

It should further be observed that Thomas Madron takes note only of Wesley's high view of the negro, giving no account of Wesley's disparaging comments on negroes and primitives when discussing man's depravity. (Madron, "John Wesley on Race")

that even the topic of slavery reinforces Wesley's doctrine of human depravity. Throughout "Thoughts Upon Slavery," comes the underlying theme that only a depraved humanity could enslave one another.

But aside from "evidence" to support his arguments, was the negro actually inferior in Wesley's opinion? His unwavering position against the institution of slavery gives strong indication that he held to a basic human equality. Certainly all men, all civilisations had not developed equally, but they did have equal potential. The lack of development was educational and environmental "considering the few means of improvement they enjoyed."¹⁴⁰

In fact, Wesley posited an inherent equality on a number of bases. Firstly, all men were equally depraved. Since the "fall," the human race had no capacity for good of itself. Different civilisations may have different sins, such as the gross idolatry and immorality of the heathen and great social sins like war and slavery among "civilised" people, but finally, original sin had taken its toll on every single human being.

Secondly, all men were equally the recipients of God's grace. This was not dependent upon having heard the gospel, because prevenient grace reached every individual, before and after Christ.¹⁴¹ So, for Wesley, the "natural man" did not actually exist. He was only hypothetical. No man lived in a natural state because of God's pervasive prevenient grace. All men were equally the recipients of it. Only their response to grace would determine future changes in their lives, but this was

¹⁴⁰ Wesley, Works, Vol. XI, ("Thoughts Upon Slavery") p. 76. Madron ("John Wesley on Race", p. 29) agrees with this evaluation.

¹⁴¹ The doctrine of prevenient grace will be examined in Chapter VIII.

totally dependent upon the individual, with no responsibility upon society or culture.

Thirdly, the negroes were unquestionably men. They were fully human. Wesley could refer to them, among all people as God's "noblest creatures," with "souls as immortal as your own."¹⁴² In fact, being equally human involved a spiritual equality. The black man was a "brother for, whether thou wilt believe it or no, such he is in the sight of Him that made him."¹⁴³

Fourthly, Wesley posited a physical equality, at least to the extent that negroes were not better suited to hard labour in hot climates than were white men: ". . . white men, even Englishmen, are well able to labour in hot climates; provided they are temperate in meat and drink, and that they innure themselves to it by degrees."¹⁴⁴

For Wesley:

The inhabitants of Africa, where they have equal motives and equal means of improvement, are not inferior to the inhabitants of Europe; to some of them they are greatly superior. Impartially survey, in their own country, the natives of Benin, and the natives of Lapland; compare (setting prejudice aside) the Samoeids and the Angolans; and on which side does the advantage lie, in point of understanding? Certainly the African is in no respect inferior to the European. 145

Some observations are in order:

1) Wesley's attitude toward a people was not determined by skin colour, so much as by how they conformed to conventions of general

¹⁴²Ibid., pp. 68, 76. (*Wesley, Works, vol. XI.*)

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 74. (*italics mine*)

social morality, such as respect for truth, life and property. Thus, when "heathen" disregarded these mores, he described them in very negative terms. By the same token, when Europeans disregarded them, he saw them as "worse than African heathen." Wesley lived in a time when strong racial attitudes were not yet fully developed or widespread. His attitudes and responses were determined more by culture than by race. This is especially seen in his reactions to the Indians, in that he could see no value in a culture so different from his own. His religion was strongly associated with his culture. Wesley lived in what we have earlier described as the "pre-racial" period, and his attitudes are congruent with that classification.

2) All men were judged by Wesley not by an absolute standard, but by their behaviour according to the light they had. Thus, those who had not heard the gospel were not necessarily lost. He could assert that no more "will be expected of them, than the living up to the light they had."¹⁴⁶ Further it was not for man to judge, but for God, who is both just and merciful:

. . . we are not required to determine any thing touching their final state. How it will please God, the judge of all, to deal with them, we may leave to God himself. But this we know, that he is not the God of the Christians only, but the God of the heathens also; that he is 'rich in mercy to all that call upon him,' according to the light they have; and that 'in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him.' 147

¹⁴⁶ Wesley, Works, Vol. VII (Sermon CVI "On Faith") p. 197.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 48. Also, in Vol. VII p. 353 (Sermon CXXV "On Living Without God") he says ". . . nor do I conceive that any man living has a right to sentence all the heathen and Mahometan world to damnation. It is far better to leave them to Him that made them, and who is 'the Father of all flesh'; who is the God of the Heathens as well as the Christians, and who hateth nothing that he hath made."

An interesting Journal entry (Vol. I, p. 522, 11 October, 1745) indicates that after reading Marcus Antonius ⁽⁶¹²⁾ he remarked: "what a strange heathen!" "I make no doubt, but this is one of those 'many', who shall come from the east and the west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, while 'the children of the kingdom', nominal Christians, are 'shut out'.

3) Both in time and thought Wesley preceded the conversionist position. He did not see conversion as a societal goal. He had no aim to bring Christian "civilisation" to the heathen. Too often, where this had happened, as in "Christian England," or "Christian Europe," he felt that the people became at best "nominally Christians," and were more evil than non-christianised "heathen":

Are Christians [nominal Christians] any better than other men? Are they better than Mahometans or Heathens? To say the truth it is well if they are not worse; worse than either Mahometans or Heathens. In many respects they are abundantly worse: but then they are not properly Christians. 148

On the contrary, his was a simple missionary desire; to bring Christianity to individuals, or rather, to bring individuals to Christianity. He was confident that the collective result of converted individuals would be a changed and improved society. While he did not believe Christian nations were responsible for the heathen in a conversionist sense, collectively, he did feel that individual Christians were spiritually responsible for those in their realm of influence. Christians were accountable for the souls of family members and servants, in fact, anyone who had any connection with the household.¹⁴⁹

Far from the tenets of conversionism, Wesley was even more greatly opposed to the values which would later characterise trusteeship. In a passage that anticipates a trusteeship mentality and the long range problems it fosters, he satirises:

A crew are driven by storm they know not where;
at length they make the land and go ashore; they
are entertained with kindness. They give the country
a new name; set up a stone or rotten plank for a
memorial; murder a dozen of the natives, and bring

¹⁴⁸ Wesley, Works, Vol. VII, p. 283 (Sermon CXVI "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity").

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 79 (Sermon XCIV "On Family Religion").

away a couple by force. Here commences a new right of dominion: Ships are sent and the natives driven out or destroyed. And this is done to civilise¹⁵⁰ and convert a barbarous and idolatrous people.

Clearly Wesley opposed not only "cultural conversion" but he also lamented British commercial policy in Africa, Asia and America.¹⁵¹

Regarding the influence of European civilisation on coastal (versus inland, insulated) populations, Wesley deplored the fact that the contact Africans had had with Europe was negative. In his "Thoughts Upon Slavery" he described Africans as "fair, just, and honest in all their dealings, unless the white men have taught them to be otherwise"¹⁵² He stated that before contact with white men, the Africans "seldom had any wars:" it was the white men that "first taught them drunkenness and avarice, and then hired them to sell one another."¹⁵³ It was also his view that the American Indian had been likewise affected by white men.¹⁵⁴

At the same time, Wesley did support the sending of Methodist missionaries to work among the slaves of the West Indies, as early as 1786,¹⁵⁵ and was certainly in favour of Samuel Davies' ministry among American slaves. But his goal was individual conversion, not the elevation of society.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., Vol. IX, p. 222 ("The Doctrine of Original Sin").

¹⁵¹ Ibid., Vol. XI, pp. 125-6 ("A Seasonable Address to the More Serious Part of the Inhabitants of Great Britain.") Madron also notes this attitude in Wesley toward "expansionist policy." See "The Political Thought of John Wesley," p. 146.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 64 ("Thoughts Upon Slavery").

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., Vol. I, p. 68 (Journal, December, 1737). Mercer suggests that "Wesley retained the idea that the less civilization one has to cope with the less collective evil he has to live in tension with" ("A Study of the Concept of Man in the Sermons of John Wesley," p. 153).

¹⁵⁵ See above, p. 196.

4) Wesley was fully cognisant of the effects of slavery on the appearance of negro inferiority. As mentioned above he accurately described the cyclic effect: slavery degraded the negro, and thus the degraded negro appeared to justify the existence of the institution of slavery. He challenged slave-owners with the truth of this, and their being guilty of maintaining the cycle.¹⁵⁶

Wesley admitted that the slaves gave an appearance of stupidity, stubbornness and wickedness, but there was no question regarding the source: "Allowing them to be as stupid as you say, to whom is that stupidity owing? Without question, it lies altogether at the door of their inhuman masters; who give them no means, no opportunity, of improving their understanding."¹⁵⁷ Thus, it was "the natural effect of their condition. Consequently, it is not their fault, but yours"¹⁵⁸ As to stubbornness and wickedness:

. . . do not these, as well as the other, lie at your door? Are not stubbornness, cunning, pilfering, and diverse other vices, the natural, necessary fruits of slavery? Is not this an observation which has been made in every age and nation? ¹⁵⁹

Wesley clearly recognised that the institution of slavery perpetuated itself by extensively degrading its victims.

Finally, Wesley's perspective on the negro must be seen in the context of his mission. His purpose was to preach God's love and grace. He saw the black man as an object of God's love and grace, just like

¹⁵⁶ See above, p. 212.

¹⁵⁷ Wesley, Works, Vol. XI, p. 74 ("Thoughts Upon Slavery").

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 74-75.

the white man, like all men. The slave, the slave-owner and merchant were all in need of God's redemption. Thus Wesley did not discriminate between depraved persons. They were equally depraved, and his calling was to preach to them. Although simplistic and romantic, there is still truth in Maldwyn Edwards' statement: "The man who regarded the world as his parish was not likely to distinguish between his parish~~oners~~ners."¹⁶⁰ He would preach to all men, and his conviction was that all would be benefitted by becoming true Christians; not only hereafter, but now. The slave would be helped, and certainly the slave-owner would not continue his oppression once he was truly converted.

¹⁶⁰ Maldwyn Edwards, John Wesley and the Eighteenth Century, p. 128.

Part II

Wesley's Doctrine of Man Related To The Question of Slavery

As seen above, Wesley had specific attitudes toward the negro and towards the institution of slavery. However, numerous individuals of the eighteenth century championed the negro slave, and for various reasons. The significant question here is whether Wesley's concern for the slave and his position against slavery were attitudes he held independently of his religious thinking, or were intricately interwoven with, and derived from his larger theology, specifically from his doctrine of man. If a relationship exists between his theology and his anti-slavery, it will be relevant to also explore the correlation of his theology to his total social ethic, again asking to what extent this ethic is derived from his theology and seeing his anti-slavery in the context of his total social ethic. Lastly, the significance of Wesley's theology as a possible seedbed for the thinking which led to the abolition of the slave trade and slavery will be investigated.

Chapter eight will comprise an overview of Wesley's distinctive doctrines concerning man; Total Depravity, Prevenient Grace, Free Will, Christian Perfection, and Stewardship. Certainly each doctrine could become a complete study of its own (as in fact they have in other works) but the purpose here is only to review them in their essence in order to discover inherent implications which relate to the question of slavery. These implications (which follow each doctrinal discussion) fall into two categories, both of which deal with the nature of man: those dealing with the questions of equality and man's ability, relating to the appropriateness of his being enslaved or his right to enslave; those dealing with the question of man's ability to know and do the right, relating to the admissibility of his treating another as a slave.

The latter category breaks down further into two groups: man in general; does he know right from wrong, and if so, can he act on such knowledge? man as Christian; is there a contradiction between being both a true Christian and a slave owner?

Regarding the doctrinal discussion, it is important to note that Wesley was not a systematic theologian (as a thorough Anglican, he saw no need to develop a systematic theology). However, because he was not a "systematic theologian," it is difficult and sometimes misleading to examine his doctrines in isolation. They grew out of life situations and it is not completely fair to attempt to transpose them into a set of neat and totally logical categories, a schema. This is not to say that the doctrines are inconsistent with logic, rather that they were developed primarily for other purposes. However, in this chapter every effort has been made to present the doctrines in a manner consistent with Wesley's total thought as found throughout his writings.

Chapter nine will relate Wesley's theology to his overall social ethic and examine that theology in light of the public assumptions and tenets which eventually assisted the anti-slavery movement.

CHAPTER VIII

An Examination of Wesley's Distinctive Doctrines,
Investigating Inherent Antislavery Implications

I

TOTAL DEPRAVITY

Wesley saw the doctrine of total human depravity as foundational to all his theology. He conceded that on this doctrine he was "within a hair's breadth" of Calvinism.¹ Further he maintained that Biblically and sociologically depravity was irrefutable. Illustrative of his unwavering position is his tract "The Dignity of Human Nature," in which can be found not one positive statement regarding man's nature, and thus no supposed dignity.² At another time he could unequivocally state:

I always did . . . clearly assert the total fall of man, and his utter inability to do any good of himself: the absolute necessity of the grace and Spirit of God to raise even a good thought or desire in our hearts; the Lord's rewarding no work, and accepting of none, but so far as they proceed from his preventing, convincing, and converting grace thro' the Beloved. The blood and righteousness of Christ being the sole meritorious cause of our salvation. 3

¹Wesley, Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 284-5 ("Minutes of Some Late Conversations," 1745.)

²Wesley, "The Dignity of Human Nature," 1762, no publisher, 66pp. (found at John Rylands University Library in a volume of Wesley's Pamphlets, Original, Vol. 4, no. 3; Hobill Collection, H 179) This tract is extracted from Wesley's longest treatise, "The Doctrine of Original Sin," 1756; Works, IX, pp. 191-464. Wesley wrote this latter tract in direct response to John Taylor's Unitarian book: The Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin (1740). Wesley's response was in 1757 and ten years later Taylor replied to him in his fourth edition. See Martin Schmidt, John Wesley, A Theological Biography, 2 vols, translated by Denis Inman (Nashville, 1973, 1st U.S. edition) Vol. 2, part 2, p. 233, note 21.

³John W. Fletcher, A Vindication of the Rev. Mr. Wesley's Last Minutes, (Bristol, 1771) p. 21.

In order to better understand Wesley's view of depravity, subsequent to the Fall, one must first see his view of original man, before the Fall. According to Wesley, Adam was the perfect man, made completely in the image of God:

In the image of God was man made, holy as he that created him is holy; merciful as the Author of all is merciful; perfect as his Father in heaven is perfect. As God is love, so man, dwelling in love, dwelt in an incorruptible picture of the God of glory. He was accordingly pure, as God is pure, from every spot of sin. He knew not evil in any kind or degree, but was inwardly sinless and undefiled. He 'loved the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his mind, and soul, and strength.' 4

Being made in God's image also meant that Adam had perfect understanding, perfect will, and perfect liberty, all working in harmony to ensure indescribable happiness.⁵ In an unpublished sermon of 1730 he described these traits in glowing terms:

Understanding was just. . . . It never was betrayed in any mistake; Whatever he perceived, he perceived as it was. He thought not at all of many things, but he thought wrong of none. . . . nothing appeared in a false light Light and darkness there were, but no twilight. . . . He was equally a stranger to error and doubt; Either he saw not at all, or he saw plainly and hence arose that other excellence of his understanding. Being just and clear, it was swift in its motion.

Far greater and nobler was his second endowment, namely a will equally perfect. It could not but be perfect while it followed the dictates of such an understanding. His affections were rational, even just and regular. . . . Man was what God is, Love.

What made his Image yet plainer in his human offspring was the liberty he enjoyed; the perfect freedom implanted, interwoven in his nature, and interwoven with all its parts. . . . His own choice was to determine him in all things. The balance did not incline to one side or the other, unless by his own deed. . . . he was the sole Lord and sovereign judge of his own actions.

⁴Wesley, Works, Vol. V, p. 54 (Sermon V, "Justification By Faith").

⁵Ibid. Vol. VI, p. 222 lists understanding, will and liberty but does not call them "perfect". See also Vol. IX, pp. 434-5 which is very similar to the Gen. 1:27 Sermon.

The results of all these, an unerring understanding, an uncorrupt will and perfect freedom, gave the last stroke to the image of God in man by crowning all these with happiness. Then indeed, to live was to enjoy. When every faculty was in its perfection, amidst abundance of objects which infinite wisdom had purposely suited to it. When man's understanding was satisfied with truth, as his will was with good: when he was at full liberty to enjoy either the Creator or the creation; to indulge in rivers of pleasure, ever new, ever pure from any mixture of pain. 6

Specifically the image of God in man included the natural, political, and moral aspects. Wesley described them as follows: the natural, "a picture of his God's own immortality; a spiritual being, endued with understanding, freedom of will, and various affections;" the political, from which he was "the governor of this lower world, having 'dominion over the fishes of the sea, and over all the earth'," and the moral was "righteousness and true holiness."⁷ Thus, the first of the human race had every possible advantage. His capacities were nearly unlimited, and his life genuinely idyllic. His "original righteousness was universal,

⁶Wesley, Sermon on Genesis 1:27, pp. 3-5. This is an unpublished sermon by Wesley, dating from 1730. Wesley's actual handwritten copy, from which this was transcribed is in the John Rylands University Library, Manchester. As this sermon was written and preached before 1738, it is interesting to note the similarities and differences between it and later sermons.

The developmental changes in his theology can be seen in his soteriology, but his doctrine of man tends to be consistent from this early period on. Passages from this Genesis 1:27 sermon (or similar passages) dealing with man, can be found in later sermons such as Sermon LVII "On The Fall of Man" (which gives a parallel account of the human physiological result of the Fall), Works, Vol. VI, pp. 215ff., and Sermon LXII "The End of Christ's Coming" (which gives a parallel account of the above quoted material dealing with understanding, will and liberty), Works, Vol. VI, p. 270. A typescript of the Gen. 1:27 sermon is in the appendix to this study.

⁷Wesley, Works, Vol. VI, p. 66 (Sermon XLV, "The New Birth"). A similar passage is found in Sermon LXII "The End of Christ's Coming" (Works, Vol. VI, pp. 269-70).

and natural, yet mutable."⁸ And with this comment dawns the possibility of man's fall.

How did the fall occur? Wesley answers:

. . . the plain answer is this: the liberty of man necessarily required that he should have some trial; else he would have had no choice, whether he should stand or not. That is, no liberty at all. 9

Therefore God presented the prohibition of eating from the tree of knowledge, this superadded test obviously bringing about Adam's failure. And in this failure, the image of God in man was greatly altered. Adam "lost both the knowledge and the love of God, without which the image of God could not subsist."¹⁰ In fact, Wesley explained that although the moral image was lost, the natural and political elements of the image were partially retained:

But that part of the 'image of God' which remained after the fall, and remains in all men to this day, is the natural image of God, namely, the spiritual nature and immortality of the soul; not excluding the political image of God, or a degree of dominion over the creatures still remaining. 11
But the moral image of God is lost and defaced

However, the loss of the moral image was the greatest tragedy, and was responsible for the ensuing and present state of mankind: he was totally depraved. The loss of righteousness and holiness meant that he was separated from God, spiritually dead. While understanding had previously been perfect, it now "mistook falsehood for truth, and truth for falsehood." ". . . Doubt perplexed it as well as error, that it could neither rest in knowledge nor ignorance." Likewise the will suffered: "Grief

⁸Ibid., Vol. IX, p. 435 ("Doctrine of Original Sin").

⁹Wesley, MS Sermon on Genesis 1:27, p. 6.

¹⁰Wesley, Works, Vol. VI, p. 67 (Sermon XLV "The New Birth"). See also Vol. V, p. 54 (Sermon V, "Justification by Faith").

¹¹Ibid., Vol. IX, p. 381 ("Doctrine of Original Sin").

and anger and hatred and fear and shame at once rushed in upon it. The whole train of earthly, sensual and devilish passions fastened on and tore it in pieces. Nay, love itself . . . became a torment." And freedom? "Liberty went away with virtue. Instead of an indulgent master, it was under a merciless tyrant. The subject of virtue became the slave of vice."¹² Further, Wesley suggested that the fall effected physical changes in the brain which would cause "confusedness of apprehension, showing itself in a thousand instances; false judgment, . . . and wrong inferences; and from these innumerable mistakes"¹³

As the federal head of the race, Adam passed on to his progeny the fate he had chosen for himself. "God originally appointed that Adam when innocent, should produce an offspring in his own holy image; and, on the other hand, that if he sinned, he should propagate his kind in his own sinful image."¹⁴ For Wesley the inheritance from Adam is both imputed sin and the disposition to sin. Man's responsibility for imputed sin remains somewhat hypothetical, and it need not take pre-eminence because man's sinful nature breeds sinful acts for which he is amply responsible. While the misery of the world is a result of sin in general, beginning with Adam, Wesley held that individuals would not

¹²Wesley, MS Sermon on Genesis 1:27, pp. 9-10.

¹³Wesley, Works, Vol. VII, p. 347 (Sermon XXIV "The Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels"). He also posits a very interesting theory in his Genesis 1:27 sermon that as soon as the forbidden fruit was eaten, a sort of chemical reaction was set in irreversible motion which began to constrict the "circulation of the fluids." In a description that could be a medical forerunner of arteriosclerosis he details the process that eventually brings death (pp. 7-8).

¹⁴Wesley, Works, Vol. IX, p. 377 ("Doctrine of Original Sin"). See also pp. 332-333 for Wesley's position on Adam as federal head.

die eternally for imputed sin.¹⁵ Regarding the transmission of sin Wesley affirmed it, yet did not claim to understand it: ". . . how it is transmitted from father to son: I answer plainly, I cannot tell; no more than I can tell how man is propagated, how a body is transmitted from father to son. I know both the one and the other fact, but I can account for neither."¹⁶

According to Wesley, the depravity of man was total. There was no mixture of good and evil in man, he was totally corrupt. There was no "light intermixed with darkness. No; none at all."¹⁷ Even when he admonished to do good in his sermon "On Working Out Our Own Slavation," he made it clear that good was only done by God, "Otherwise, we might have had some room for boasting, as if it were our own desert, some goodness in us, or some good thing done by us"¹⁸

This total depravity involved both man's nature and his actions. His evil actions were the product of his evil nature: "From this

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 315. He further states (p. 286) that men are responsible for their own sin more than for Adam's: "That all men are liable for these /punishments/ for Adam's sin alone, I do not assert; but they are so, for their own outward and inward sins, which, through their own fault, spring from the infection of their nature." It appears that Wesley views the principle of Adam's sin as imputed to man, but not the actual act. He clarifies (pp. 409-10) "I do not mean that the actual commission of it /Adam's sin/ was imputed to any beside himself; (it was impossible it should;) nor is the guilt of it imputed to any of his descendents, in the full latitude of it, or in regard to its attendant circumstances. It constitutes none of them equally guilty with him. Yet both that sin itself, and a degree of guilt on account of it, are imputed to all his posterity; the sin itself is imputed to them, as included in their head. And on this account, they are reputedly guilty, are 'children of wrath,' liable to the threatened punishment."

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 335.

¹⁷ Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 57 (Sermon XLIV "Original Sin").

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 508 (Sermon LXXXI "On Working Out Our Own Salvation"). See also Works, Vol. V, p. 73 (Sermon VI "The Righteousness of Faith") and p. 257 (Sermon XXI "Sermon On The Mount, Discourse I").

infection of our nature (call it original sin, or what you please) spring many if not all, actual sins."¹⁹ And the byproducts of this depravity were evident throughout the world: ". . . death . . . with all his forerunners and attendants, - pain, sickness . . .,"²⁰ animals becoming predators and losing their "loving obedience to man,"²¹ and even the introduction of an element of human female inferiority.²²

To Wesley the doctrine of total depravity was important, even crucial to orthodox theology. He considered it a kind of watershed dividing true religion from false, ". . . because if man be not

¹⁹Ibid., Vol. IX, pp. 274-5 ("The Doctrine of Original Sin"). See also Vol. V. p. 254 (Sermon XXI "Sermon On The Mount, I").

²⁰Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 231 (Sermon LIX "God's Love To Fallen Man"). See also Sermon LVII "On The Fall of Man," (Vol. VI, p. 215). In "The Doctrine of Original Sin" (Vol. IX, p. 326) Wesley asserts that suffering happens among the innocent, as in the cases of animals and infants as well as the life of Christ. It is still the result of sin, but in these instances, imputed sin, not the actual sins of the sufferers.

²¹Ibid., p. 246 (Sermon LX "The General Deliverance"). In this sermon Wesley maintains that prior to the fall all animals were harmless and experienced "loving obedience to man" just as man lived in "loving obedience to God." He further maintains that animals lost much of their original intelligence. See also Sermon LVI "God's Approbation of His Works" (Vol. VI, pp. 206ff.) wherein Wesley posits the fall of the world of nature as a result of man's fall (especially p. 212).

²²Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 218 (Sermon LVII "On The Fall of Man"). In fairness to Wesley it must be pointed out that he was beyond his age in attitudes toward female equality. No doubt his high regard for his mother, and her arduous endeavours to educate all of her children, males and females had left its imprint. In Sermon XCVIII "The Reward of the Righteous," Wesley despairs the current attitude that many women are brought up "as if they were only designed for agreeable playthings," (p. 126, Vol. VII) and encourages his female hearers: "Yield not to that vile bondage any longer! You as well as men, are rational creatures. You, like them, were made in the image of God; you are equally candidates for immortality; you too are called of God, as you have time, to 'do good unto all men.'" (Ibid.)

naturally corrupt, then all religion, Jewish and Christian is vain.

Seeing it is all built on this, all method of cure presupposes the disease."²³ If original sin is not true, the grace of God and the work

of Christ are superfluous for infants.²⁴ Wesley called upon Church authorities from Augustine to Athanasius to support his stand concerning the importance of the doctrine.²⁵ He concluded that original sin:

is the first grand distinguishing point between Heathenism and Christianity. The one acknowledges that many men are infected with many vices, and even born with a proneness to them; but supposes withal, that in some the natural good much over-balances the evil: The other declares that all men are 'conceived in sin,' and 'shapen in wickedness;' - that hence there is in every man a 'carnal mind, which is enmity against God, which is not, cannot be, subject to' his 'law;' and which so infects the whole soul, that 'there dwelleth in' him, 'in his flesh,' in his natural state, 'no good thing;' but 'every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is evil,' only evil, and that 'continually.'

Hence . . . all who deny this, call it original sin, or by any other title, are but Heathens still in the fundamental point which differences Heathenism from Christianity. 26

Among Wesleyan scholars, Wesley's position on total depravity has been a point of disagreement. George Croft Cell posits that "the Wesleyan doctrine of saving faith . . . is . . . a complete renewal of the Luther-Calvin thesis that in the thought of salvation God is everything, man is nothing."²⁷ William R. Cannon feels that Cell's Calvinistic interpretation of Wesley is headed in the right direction, but goes too far.²⁸ According to Cannon, Wesley's rejection of

²³ Wesley, MS Sermon on Genesis 1:27, p. 15.

²⁴ Wesley, Works, Vol. IX, p. 429 ("Doctrine of Original Sin").

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 63 (Sermon XLIV "Original Sin").

²⁷ George Croft Cell, The Rediscovery of John Wesley, (New York, 1935) p. 271.

²⁸ William R. Cannon, The Theology of John Wesley, (New York, Nashville, 1946) p. 105.

Calvinistic predestination "shifts the balance from an emphasis in which irresistible grace is supreme to one in which human response comes to occupy the chief position."²⁹ In fact, Wesley did subscribe to a "total depravity" very much akin to Calvin's. But whereas Calvin relied on predestination to facilitate redemption, Wesley maintained that prevenient grace, given universally, allowed man's responsibility to be reinstituted, yet without altering his depravity. Thus redemption could occur without either predestination, or man's inherent goodness. Man for Wesley was fully depraved, helpless by himself, but by grace, enabled to respond to God. The position is one of very sensitive balance. While there is utterly no room for pride, for what man can do of himself there is the paradox of security in that by God's universal prevenient grace man is not totally helpless - he can respond; not totally hopeless - there is a way of escape. The moral dimension of the image of God in man can be restored.

As stated earlier, Wesley's view of depravity cannot be fully understood when isolated from his other thought. It must be seen in context, juxtaposed between original man, created in the image of God, and redeemed man with the potential of having that image restored. Throughout Wesley's writings is the confidence that men can be ". . . restored to their first estate, and the enjoyment of God."³⁰ By God's grace, ". . . what we lost in Adam, even the image and likeness of God, we might receive in Christ Jesus."³¹ This was not just imputed, but an actual "renewal in the whole image of God, in all righteousness and true

²⁹Ibid., p. 106.

³⁰Wesley, Works, Vol. VII, p. 512 (Sermon CXLI "The Holy Spirit").

³¹Ibid., p. 513.

holiness."³² While the moral image (righteousness and holiness) was most defaced in the fall, it is likewise most wholly renewed in the new birth. Again, while the political and natural image were not totally ruined in the fall,³³ neither are they reinstated to their former state

³²Ibid., p. 346 (Sermon CXXIV "The Heavenly Treasure In Earthen Vessels"). Numerous passages indicating the renewal of the image of God in man are found in Wesley's sermons and treatises, some of which are here noted:

- Vol. V, pp. 70, 74; Sermon VI "The Righteousness of Faith"
 p. 86, Sermon VII "The Way to the Kingdom"
 p. 141, Sermon XII "The Witness of Our Spirit"
 p. 169, Sermon XIV "Repentance of Believers"
 p. 184, Sermon XV "The Great Assize"
 p. 203, Sermon XVII "The Circumcision of the Heart"
 p. 224, Sermon XIX "The Privilege of Those That Are Born of God"
 p. 241, Sermon XX "The Lord Our Righteousness"
 p. 256, Sermon XXI "The Sermon on the Mount, I"
 pp. 267, 269, Sermon XXII, Discourse II
 p. 294, Sermon XXIV, Discourse IV
 p. 359, Sermon XXVII, Discourse VII
 p. 363, Sermon XXVIII, Discourse VIII
 pp. 388-9, Sermon XXIX, Discourse IX
 p. 402, Sermon XXX, Discourse X
 p. 427, Sermon XXXIII, Discourse XIII
 Vol. VI, p. 64-5, Sermon XLIV, "The New Birth"
 pp. 222-3, Sermon LVII, "The Fall of Man"
 p. 506, Sermon LXXXI, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation"
 Vol. VII, p. 230, Sermon CIX, "What is Man?"
 p. 233, Sermon CX, "The Discoveries of Faith"
 p. 346, Sermon CXXIV, "The Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels"
 p. 353, Sermon CXXV, "On Living Without God"
 p. 430, Sermon CXXXII, "At The foundation of City-Road Chapel"
 pp. 486, 491, Sermon CXXXVIII, "On Grieving the Holy Spirit"
 p. 509, Sermon CXLI, "On The Holy Spirit" (also, pp. 512-3)
 Vol. VIII, p. 47, "A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion"
 Vol. IX, p. 308 "The Doctrine of Original Sin"
 MS Sermon on Genesis 1:27, p. 15.

³³This statement may appear to contradict the fact that Wesley held to "total depravity." In fact, when saying that the political and natural image were not totally ruined, Wesley means that man was not lowered to the position of the animals. He still had some dominion over them, and had greater understanding than the animal kingdom. To Wesley, total depravity meant that man was completely unable to merit God's favour, not that he was totally devoid of all the qualities God had given at creation.

in renewal. Thus man carries some permanent scars in his earthly life, particularly in his understanding. True, man only has understanding because he retains a remnant of the image of God,³⁴ but even in grace, God ". . . does not destroy all that weakness of understanding, which is the natural consequence of the soul's dwelling in a corruptible body; so that still, Humanum est errare et nescire."³⁵ That element of the natural image of God is renewed only to the extent ". . . as is requisite to our pleasing God."³⁶ However, Wesley felt that man had the capacity and responsibility to develop his intellect. The purpose of education was ". . . as far as it can, to supply the loss of original perfection." It should be considered as the "art of recovering man to his rational perfection,"³⁷ even though that level would not be achieved in this life.

In spite of the evil, pain and misery brought on by the fall, God's love and Providence triumph and allow man to finally be better off because of the fall. In no way does this fact allow Wesley to concede that the fall was part of God's plan; it only allows God's grace to "much more abound." The result is that ". . . we may gain infinitely more than we have lost."³⁸

We may now attain both higher degrees of holiness, and higher degrees of glory, than it would have been possible for us to attain. If Adam had not sinned, the Son of God had not died: Consequently that amazing instance of the love of God to man had never existed, which has, in all ages, excited the highest joy, and love, and gratitude from his children. We might have loved God

³⁴ Wesley, Works, Vol. VII, p. 345 (Sermon CXXIV "The Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels").

³⁵ Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 275 (Sermon LXII, "The End of Christ's Coming").

³⁶ Ibid., p. 223 (Sermon LVII, "The Fall of Man").

³⁷ Ibid., Vol. VII, p. 87 (Sermon XCV, "On The Education of Children") Wesley is here quoting from Law's Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life.

³⁸ Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 224 (Sermon LVII "The Fall of Man").

the Creator, God the Preserver, God the Governor;
but there would have been no place for love to God
the Redeemer. 39

Because of the stress Wesley placed on the doctrine of total depravity, it is important to observe the implications toward the institution of slavery which are inherent within the doctrine. The first implication relates to the fact that Wesley assumed an original equality of all men. Although the argument is hypothetical since the fall preceded procreation, Wesley posited that had Adam not sinned, his progeny would have equally retained the image of God and the perfection that accompanied it. He felt that it was within God's plan that Adam would reproduce according to his condition, either holy, or sinful.⁴⁰ Believing in monogenesis, he said that all the human inhabitants of the earth would carry the qualities and traits of the first parents. No second class stratum was designed for the purpose of servitude. That was the role of the supralapsarian animal kingdom.⁴¹ For those who suggested that slaves were the descendants of a different race of men, created for the purpose of servitude, Wesley would have had no tolerance.

A second and more applicable implication grows out of the fact of the fall. If all men would have been equally perfect, all men are now equally depraved. His position asserts that no man since the fall ever was "good," nor is there any mixture of good and evil in any man. All

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Vol. IX, p. 377 ("The Doctrine of Original Sin").

⁴¹ Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 246 (Sermon LX "The General Deliverance").

men are totally depraved.⁴² After visiting the House of Lords he commented: "I had frequently heard that this was the most venerable assembly in England. But how was I disappointed! What is a Lord, but a sinner, born to die!"⁴³ And regardless of their social status, he preached to all men explicitly of their sinful, depraved condition.⁴⁴ At times Wesley described heathen as more evil than nominal Christians, and again he stated that the latter were worse, but even this vacillation indicates that to him all men were evil. They were only painted in a more negative light if he had a particular point to prove about the doctrine of depravity.⁴⁵

According to Wesley, men were so universally and equally depraved that he considered no man capable of self-government. It is interesting to observe that he did not develop a theory of government based on the regenerated man, in whom the image of God had been restored. But in man's depraved condition he was morally impotent, and therefore politically incompetent. Every individual's corruption meant that he was "viciously selfish and thus an enemy of the true welfare of the community."⁴⁶ The

⁴²Ibid., pp. 59-63 (Sermon XLIV, "Original Sin"). Also, Vol. IX, p. 324, ("The Doctrine of Original Sin").

⁴³Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 296 (Journal, January 25, 1785).

⁴⁴Ibid., Vol. I, p. 411 (Journal, January 24, 1743). This is an interesting account of Wesley's preaching when "some of the rich and great were present." He describes how he preached that "they were all children of wrath," and finally one of the Lords made his early exit saying "'Tis hot! 'Tis very hot.'"

⁴⁵Cf. Works, Vol. IX, p. 324, pp. 209-12, Vol. VI, pp. 278, 345-6, Vol. VII, p. 285, and Vol. V, p. 482; Vol. V, pp. 17-18, 365. See also Chapter seven above, pp. 222-227.

⁴⁶Allan Lamar Cooper, "John Wesley: A Study in Theology and Social Ethics," (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1962) p. 121.

responsibility for defending and upholding the law, which was based on God's Law, was given to God's representative, the monarch, who was likewise held responsible to the law. Wesley supported the ideal of a constitutional monarchy, but not monarchy by divine right.⁴⁷

The implication for slavery is clear: If Wesley opposed "democracy," or self government because of man's unilateral depravity, there could

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 106-7. See also Wesley, Works, Vol. XI, p. 97. For Wesley's attitude on government, civil and religious liberty, and suffrage, see his "Thoughts Concerning the Origin of Power," "Thoughts Upon Liberty," and "Some Observations On Liberty." Further, his attitudes toward government can be seen in his response to the early conflict between Britain and the American colonies, "A Calm Address to Our American Colonies," "A Seasonable Address To The Inhabitants of Great Britain," and "A Calm Address to the Inhabitants of England." All in Works, Vol. XI.

It is quite interesting to observe that a similar view of man's corrupt nature provides the impetus for completely opposed views of government in Wesley and Reinhold Niebuhr. Wesley felt that man's depravity made him incapable of having any hand in his own government. Therefore a monarch, although likewise depraved was vested with the authority of maintaining law and order. God's providential hand had a part, of course, in the appointing of that monarch. However, because the monarch was also depraved Wesley strongly opposed his having "absolute" authority. The "law" was a higher authority than the monarch, and determined his as well as the people's parameters, the law having roots in God's law. (Wesley, Works, Vol. IV, p. 100). Thus, the "constitutional monarchy" allowed the law to protect the people from the possible extremes of a totally depraved King, while the King protected the people from the dangers of a totally depraved populace. In other words, the King prevented anarchy; the law prevented tyranny. Even so for Wesley the locus of power was God, and therefore he might confer authority on another form of government (Works, Vol. XI, p. 47).

On the other hand, Niebuhr suggests that it is man's depravity, his will to power that causes tyranny to be the natural outcome of total authority resting in one individual, or a small group. The safeguard against such tyranny is democracy: "It is the highest achievement of democratic societies that they embody the principle of resistance to government within the principle of government itself. The citizen is thus armed with 'constitutional' power to resist the unjust exactions of government." (Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, London, 1943/2 vols. Vol. II, p. 278). In an oft quoted statement, he suggests: "Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but his inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary." (Reinhold Niebuhr, The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness: A Vindication of Democracy and a Critique of its Traditional Defense (New York, 1944).

certainly be no room for a system in which one depraved individual, a slave owner wielded complete governing authority over another. While the system of slavery was in opposition to all the precepts of the Bible, the additional fact of the equality of depravity made that doctrine clearly contradictory to the practice of one man usurping the total authority and control of another. Universal total depravity carried implications beyond the question of slavery. Madron indicates that Wesley ". . . infused into the English lower classes the concept of equality" ⁴⁸

He goes on to explain:

Wesley's reaction to Voltaire came from a dislike both of Voltaire's Deism and of his ethics, one aspect of which was his Voltaire's denial of equality which contrasted sharply to Wesley's attitude as demonstrated in his reaction toward the class structure of the day and toward race. Wesley's attitude is grounded firmly in his theology and in his ethics. 49

The concept of depravity has implications against slavery for yet another reason. For Wesley, man's depraved condition is always seen in contrast to man's original perfection, i.e., created in God's image. Further, the doctrine of original sin is always viewed by Wesley with an eye to the future, when by grace, the Image of God will be restored in man. Thus depravity for Wesley is never final, even though it is total. Significantly then, throughout Wesley's doctrine of man runs a thread of man's infinite worth. This worth of course, is not because of man in

⁴⁸ Madron, "The Political Thought of John Wesley," p. 84.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 84-5. Warner agrees that Wesley's doctrine of depravity ". . . was probably the source of more genuine democratic social feeling than any other conception of wide currency, for it placed rich and poor, high and low, on a level in their equality of need and worth. Critics from the higher social groups complained that this hateful doctrine degraded them to the disgusting level of the common herd." (Warner, op. cit., p. 64). See also Chapter seven, pp. 220-221.

himself, but because of God's grace. But that distinction is merely academic and irrelevant because God's grace is universal; no man is without it. This Wesleyan assumption brings perhaps the greatest indictment against the institution of slavery. All of mankind are degraded by depravity, yet every man is the recipient of God's grace, and thus of immeasurable worth. In his sermon "What is Man?" Wesley contrasts man's physical smallness and short duration to the universe and eternity, but asserts that man's soul is eternal and of untold worth. His evidence is that God has such regard for man that he would send his son on man's behalf.⁵⁰

It is inconceivable that human beings, originally made in the image of God, and potentially able to have that image restored, should be denuded of their infinite worth and further degraded by slavery. Wesley asks rhetorically "Did the Creator intend that the noblest creatures in the visible world should live such a life as this /slavery/? Are these thy glorious work, Parent of Good?"⁵¹ By contrast, the hyper-Calvinism of Wesley's day could conceivably justify slavery because while all men were depraved, they were not all the recipients of God's grace and thus their worth was questionable.⁵² For the Calvinist, depravity was seen as

⁵⁰ Wesley, Works, Vol. VII, pp. 171-2, 174 (Sermon CIII, "What Is Man?").

⁵¹ Ibid., Vol. XI, p. 68 ("Thoughts Upon Slavery"). Madron (The Political Thought of John Wesley, p. 120) agrees that "Wesley thought both liberty and equality were due every man" because of "Wesley's view that God's highest creation - man - was entitled to respect because he was God's creation."

⁵² Apparently Wesley noted this danger, for in his sermon against predestination he mentioned that that doctrine "directly tends to destroy our zeal for good works" because it ". . . naturally tends . . . to destroy our love to the greater part of mankind, namely, the evil and unthankful," the non-elect. (Sermon CXXVIII, "Free Grace," Works, Vol. VII, p. 378) That this danger was more real than hypothetical is borne out by historical incidents such as Cromwell's massacre at Drogheda. The fact that the garrison was comprised of Catholics who were considered to be heathen, and not Christians, made it acceptable to exterminate them.

(note continued, p. 253)

an independent doctrine; for Wesley it was a doctrine held in tension between man's original perfection and a possible restoration by grace. The restoration of that image is what Wesley called perfection, the doctrine he felt God had called him to propagate. The implications of perfection on slavery will be dealt with below.

The doctrine of total depravity had been used by some in the eighteenth century to justify slavery. It was argued that since man was totally depraved, he could not be held responsible for his actions. This could apply to the slave traders and slave owners. More frequently it was applied to the slaves themselves. Since they were not spiritually or morally responsible for themselves they could, and in some instances should be placed under the control of another. This justification however was not supported by Wesley's view of depravity. Because of prevenient grace, man, although totally depraved, regained a measure of responsibility. This will be dealt with more thoroughly under "Free Will" below. It is clear however, that Wesley's doctrine of depravity indicates that the nature of man is incompatible with slavery. All men have roots in an original equality, and no man is sufficiently insulated from the effects of depravity that he has any right or ability to maintain unilateral rule over another.

(Footnote 52 continued from page 252)

On the other hand, if men were Christians, the elect, they would necessarily be treated differently, as indicated by the Dutch East India Company policy that baptism made one a member of the Christian community, and therefore entitled to his freedom. (Ritner, op. cit., p. 47) Undoubtedly, this double standard (based on the inherent worth of the elect, and the non-worth of the heathen) is related to the early practice in England of slaves seeking baptism in order to gain their freedom. Ritner also mentions that in the eighteenth century "simplified corrupted Calvinism" particularly the doctrine of the elect, led to the conclusion that "the heathen fell outside the scheme of salvation." (Ritner, op. cit., p. 57) In Africa the colour of one's skin became a sign of election (ibid., p.58).

II

PREVENIENT GRACE

In order to comprehend, with any degree of accuracy, Wesley's theology, one must come to grips with his concept of prevenient grace. It is pivotal to his doctrine of man, his soteriology and Christology. Further, it is the factor that allows apparent contradictions in Wesley's thought to be held in tension, for example his holding to the total depravity of man, while still maintaining that man universally has a conscience; his positing the unchallenged sovereignty of God, while giving man a degree of freedom; his pushing man to a point of having responsibility for his salvation, while insisting that salvation is totally divorced from works-righteousness and is solely dependent on God's grace. It is in this doctrine that Wesley attempts to balance the "pessimism of nature" with a genuine "optimism of grace".⁵³

Although Wesley saw himself to be theologically within the tradition of Arminius, he felt that the doctrine of prevenient grace came from the larger Christian tradition. In fact, it goes back at least as far as Augustine and has been consistently used in responding to Pelagianism or any denial of the divine initiative in man's salvation.⁵⁴ Wesley found his official source in the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. One reference to prevenient grace therein is article X:

The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling upon God; Wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will,

⁵³ Gordon Rupp, Principalities and Powers (London, 1952), p. 77.

⁵⁴ Michael Joseph Scanlon, "The Christian Anthropology of John Wesley" (unpublished S.T.D. thesis, The Catholic University of America, 1969), p. 91.

and working with us, when we have that good will.⁵⁵

The doctrine was held firmly within the general tradition of English Protestantism, in which Wesley was nurtured. While he learned from his tradition, his concept of the nature and function of prevenient grace is more than extractions from the Anglican doctrine; it is distinctively his own, and comprises one of his major contributions to Protestant thought.⁵⁶

There is a definite difference in Wesley's concept of prevenient grace before and after 1738. Prior to that date he held that it was given in regeneration at baptism, and thereafter made it possible for man to be responsible for his salvation through obedience. Thus, it was "not just man working, but man empowered by grace working."⁵⁷ After 1738 he saw this grace as God's gift through Christ to every man, even before baptism, preparing the way for his regeneration.

Wesley nowhere gives a theological definition of prevenient grace, but he describes its characteristics. It is God's grace, going before, or "preventing" as he typically states. It is the "power of Christ," without which, "we should be devils the next moment."⁵⁸ While it is a result of the atonement, it functions proleptically, affecting all men since the fall.⁵⁹ Likewise, it is not apportioned to some and withheld

⁵⁵ E. J. Bicknell, A Theological Introduction to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England (London, 1919, new impression, 1953) p. 219.

⁵⁶ For a most comprehensive study of this topic, the reader is referred to Charles A. Rogers, "The Concept of Prevenient Grace in the Theology of John Wesley," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Duke University, 1967.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 142-3, 129.

⁵⁸ Wesley, Works, Vol. V, p. 167 (Sermon XIV "The Repentance of Believers").

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 436 (Sermon XXXIV, "The Original Nature, Property and Use of the Law").

from others; it is universal: ". . . there is no man, unless he has quenched the Spirit, that is wholly void of the grace of God."⁶⁰ Further, the initial giving of it is irresistible, as it "waiteth not for the call of man."⁶¹ Scanlon points out an interesting difference in Wesley and Arminius. The latter holds that when grace is offered, man has the power to accept or reject it. However, "Wesley goes further than the Dutch theologian No man is ever without grace, because prevenient grace is given to every man born into this world."⁶² Although initially equally given to all men, this grace can be diminished or increased in the individual by his response to it.⁶³

Beyond the characteristics, Wesley speaks specifically of the benefits of prevenient grace. It operates in relation to reason, God's law, and human conscience. In the fall, man lost much of his ability to reason, particularly regarding knowledge about God. However, the grace of Christ partially removes that impediment. By reason, "assisted by the Holy Ghost" we are enabled to understand the scriptures, learn about the attributes of God, and understand the "nature and the condition of justification."⁶⁴ Simply, all men, of all ages know more about God because of "his Spirit opening and enlightening the eyes of their understanding" through prevenient grace. This is an important beginning, the "foundation" and "superstructure" of religion, but Wesley makes it

⁶⁰Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 512 (Sermon LXXXV "On Working Out Our Own Salvation"); See also V, p. 436 (Sermon XXXIV "The Original Nature, Property and Use of the Law"); Vol. VI, p. 44 (Sermon XLIII "The Scripture Way of Salvation"); Vol. VI, p. 223 (Sermon LVII "The Fall of Man"); Vol. VII, p. 373-4 (Sermon CXXVIII "Free Grace"); Vol. IX, p. 273 ("The Doctrine of Original Sin").

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Scanlon, op. cit., p. 94.

⁶³Wesley, Works, Vol. V, p. 512, VI p. 44.

⁶⁴Ibid., Vol. VI, pp. 354-5 (Sermon LXX "The Case of Reason Impartially Considered").

clear that even divinely assisted reason cannot produce faith, hope and love;⁶⁵ it never brings personal knowledge of God (salvation), only knowledge about God.

A second major benefit is that through prevenient grace, all men have the moral law of God re-inscribed on their hearts:

. . . God did not despise the work of his own hands; but, being reconciled to man through the Son of his love, he, in some measure, re-inscribed the law on the heart of his dark, sinful creature. 66

Thus, all men have some knowledge of the law, if not through the commandments, then "written in their hearts, by the same hand which wrote the commandments on the tables of stone."⁶⁷ Regardless, no man can claim the excuse of not knowing good from evil.

The greatest benefit however, is the existence of "conscience" in every human being. From the Greek and Latin roots Wesley defines this as the concurrent knowledge of two different things: one's actions, and the quality of those actions. He goes on:

Conscience, then, is that faculty whereby we are at once conscious of our own thoughts, words, and actions; and of their merit or demerit, of their being good or bad; and, consequently, deserving either praise or censure. And some pleasure generally attends the former sentence; some uneasiness the latter: But this varies exceedingly, ⁶⁸ according to education and a thousand other circumstances.

Significantly, the gift of conscience is universal: "Can it be denied that something of this is found in every man born into the world?

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 354-9. See also Rogers, op. cit., pp. 172-3; John Deschner, Wesley's Christology An Interpretation, (Dallas, 1960) p. 92; and Wesley's Notes, John 1:9, Romans 1:19.

⁶⁶ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 436 (Sermon XXXIV, "The Original Nature . . . of the Law").

⁶⁷ Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 507 (Sermon LXXXV "On Working Out Our Own Salvation").

⁶⁸ Ibid., Vol. VII, p. 187 (Sermon CV "On Conscience"). On p. 188 Wesley states that the conscience acts as "witness," testifying what we have done and thought, "judge," passing sentence on it, and then it "executes the sentence," with feelings of satisfaction or uneasiness.

And does it not appear as soon as understanding opens, as soon as reason begins to dawn? Does not every one then begin to know that there is a difference between good and evil"69 Every person in the world, regardless of his religion or culture, has an innate sense of justice and mercy. He is aware when he conforms to those principles in dealing with others; he is pricked when he does not. So universal is this faculty that men tend to call it natural, but Wesley disagrees, stating that it is supernatural, and "above all his natural endowments."⁷⁰ So important was the concept of conscience in Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace, that he, in one respect, made the two synonymous:

"No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called natural conscience It is more properly termed, preventing grace."⁷¹

Wesley scholars agree on the primacy of prevenient grace in Wesley's theology. Further, they agree that its predominant role is to bring man to repentance. However, they disagree in regard to how it functions, and in this issue lies a most important key to all of Wesley's theology. It in fact determines the real nature of man. Generally, there are two schools of interpretation for Wesley's understanding of prevenient grace in relation to salvation. The first, and most widely

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 187.

⁷⁰ Ibid. Wesley's consistent, mature thought posits that conscience while in all men, is God's gift, and not merely "natural." However, in September, 1790, only nine months before his death, he made a less dogmatic statement: "Certainly, whether this is natural or superadded by the grace of God, it is found, at least in some small degree, in every child of man. Something of this is found in every human heart, passing sentence concerning good and evil, not only in all Christians, but in all Mahometans, all Pagans, yea, the vilest of savages." (Works, Vol. VII, p. 345, Sermon CXXIV "The Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels"). Regardless, the point he always maintained was that all men know good from evil.

⁷¹ Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 512, (*italics*, Wesley's), also Vol. VI, p. 44.

held posits that this grace gives to unregenerate man a liberty whereby he can choose either to co-operate with God or oppose God's action in his life. As Lindström says, prevenient grace ". . . enables everyone to turn to God, and thus makes man himself responsible for his own damnation."⁷² This view suggests that man and God work together (a synergism) to effect man's salvation, but God's action outweighs man's. The major difference between this view and Pelagianism is that while the outcome is similar (man has the ability to choose), for Pelagius, this is due to man's uncorrupted will while for Wesley it is due solely to the universal grace of God through the atonement. To safeguard against such association with Pelagius, Starkey calls the synergism "evangelical," thereby ensuring that Wesley realised it was in no way natural to man, but the specific gift of God.⁷³

The other school feels that this view does not adequately penetrate Wesley's thought, and that it attributes more to man than Wesley did. Scholars of this school hold that according to Wesley, prevenient grace acts in a negative rather than a positive way. Instead of restoring a degree of freedom and enabling man to will God, it creates an awareness of human hopelessness and the utter inefficacy of human effort in salvation.

Man is not saved until he despairs completely of his own efforts and relies wholly on God's grace. As he ceases to resist God's grace, God is able to forgive

⁷²Harald Lindström, Wesley and Sanctification, A Study in the Doctrine of Salvation, (Stockholm, 1946), p. 50.

⁷³Lycurgus M. Starkey, Jr., The Work of the Holy Spirit, A Study in Wesleyan Theology, (New York, 1962), pp. 116-123. This school of interpretation includes others such as William R. Cannon, The Theology of John Wesley, Umphrey Lee, John Wesley and Modern Religion (Nashville, 1936), Harald Lindström, op. cit., Maximin Piette, John Wesley and the Evolution of Protestantism, (New York, 1937, and Colin W. Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today (London, 1960).

and renew him. Thus the purpose of prevenient grace is . . . to produce a radical self-knowledge, a conviction of sin and helplessness, which drives man to despair so that God can have full course in his life.

By this means Wesley resolves the much-debated issue between synergism and monergism and goes beyond these traditional distinctions to make a unique contribution to Christian thought. 74

The present writer concurs that this latter interpretation of Wesley more accurately defines his true position.⁷⁵ Further, it is consistent with both Wesley's doctrine of total depravity and his view that man possesses a conscience. It allows man to be helpless regarding his salvation, and yet not to be like a puppet, controlled by the strings of predestination.

Rogers goes further, however, contending that at one point the above-mentioned schools are actually very similar. Although their wording is slightly different, they show man to have a more active role in receiving faith than Rogers feels is genuinely Wesleyan.⁷⁶ They speak of man being enabled through grace to "co-operate with God in accepting offers of grace and faith", or to "cease resisting" God's overtures in his life.⁷⁷ Either of these leaves man's action determinative in regard to faith. In his very insightful study Rogers describes more precisely just how prevenient grace relates to the whole salvation process for Wesley. The universal

⁷⁴Robert E. Chiles, "From Free Grace to Free Will," Religion in Life, XXVII (Summer, 1958) p. 441. This second school is also seen in such studies as: George Croft Cell, The Rediscovery of John Wesley, Robert E. Cushman, "Salvation For All" Methodism, ed. William K. Anderson, (New York, 1947). The studies by Chiles and Cushman comprise two of the best studies of Wesley's concept of grace.

⁷⁵Wesley, Works, Vol. V, p. 14. Here Wesley speaks of men's "despair of being saved by their own works" (Sermon I, "Salvation by Faith").

⁷⁶Rogers, op. cit., p. 15.

⁷⁷Ibid.

gift of prevenient grace gives all men awareness of moral law, and their distance from it.⁷⁸ Man's conscience (the direct product of prevenient grace) brings him to the realisation that he is helpless; he cannot of himself choose good, or will God. At this point he is free to reject God's proposed plan, continuing to strive in his own power, or free to cast himself on God's mercy. If he chooses the latter, he experiences what Wesley calls "legal repentance," or conviction and thorough despair, and will begin doing God's prescribed works "meet for repentance."

Rogers clarifies:

The most accurate way to understand Wesley's view of the works of repentance is as God's scripturally appointed means through which man may be led to deeper conviction of sin, and through which the Holy Spirit may work faith in his heart. Through hearing and reading the Word of God, through prayer and meditation, and through the observation of the Lord's Supper as well as through works of mercy to the neighbor, man may become increasingly aware of his sinfulness, of the wrath of God against it, and of the futility of his own works. 79

These works are not conditions for justification, or even conditions to be met in order to guarantee faith. They merely serve as the "means of grace" in the context of which ". . . God may approach man with the . . . gift of justifying faith."⁸⁰ Man should do these works of repentance because God has appointed them as his means of grace, and because through the provision of prevenient grace man is able to choose

⁷⁸Thus Wesley felt it was more effective to preach law than gospel in order to enhance this process. See Works, Vol. V, p. 449 (Sermon XXXV "The Law Established Through Faith"). Cf. Works, II, p. 117.

⁷⁹Rogers, op. cit., p. 239. See Wesley, Works, Vol. V. Sermon XVI "The Means of Grace," pp. 187ff. Also p. 81 (Sermon VII "The Way to the Kingdom").

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 240. See also Wesley, Works, Vol. V, p. 200.

them.⁸¹

Wesley is very clear however, that the only condition of justification is faith:

Faith is the condition, and the only condition of justification. . . . none is justified but he that believes: Without faith no man is justified this alone is sufficient for justification. Every one that believes is justified, whatever else he has or has not. In other words: No man is justified till he believes; every man, when he believes, is justified.⁸²

But as Rogers makes clear, for Wesley this faith (believing) "is not considered to be a meritorious cause of justification. God does not pardon man for the sake of his faith" ⁸³ Rather, saving faith is a gift of God, which He has sovereignly designed to give through the means of grace. Here it must be remembered that man's ability to choose to do the works of repentance is directly the result of prevenient grace; thus by grace, man "has in himself the casting voice."⁸⁴

Regarding faith being God's gift through a sovereign act as opposed to the result of man's volitional response, Rogers explains:

In the numerous places in which Wesley speaks of justifying faith as a gift of God there is no suggestion that he views this gift as a "thing" offered or extended to man, which man by a positive act of understanding or will is to accept Faith is . . . not a gift offered, but a gift given.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Wesley makes it clear that God is not bound, and although he ordinarily works through these means of grace, he does not always. There are occasions when they are not possible, as in the case of the thief on the cross who when he repented (enabled by prevenient grace) was immediately given faith. See Works, Vol. VI, p. 48 and Vol. VIII, p. 57 ("Further Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion"). In his sermon "Justification by Faith" (Works, Vol. V, p. 55) Wesley confirms that it is God who "enables us to perform."

⁸² Wesley, Works, Vol. VI, p. 48 (Sermon XLIII, "The Scripture Way of Salvation"), Vol. V, pp. 60-62 (Sermon V, "Justification by Faith"), Vol. VIII, p. 392 ("Answer to the Rev. Mr. Church").

⁸³ Rogers, op. cit., p. 213. See also Wesley, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 362 ("The Principles of a Methodist").

⁸⁴ Wesley, Works, Vol. VI, p. 281 (Sermon LXIII "The General Spread of the Gospel").

⁸⁵ Rogers, op. cit., p. 217.

The idea that man has some control in accepting faith, or initiating it is foreign to Wesley's thought. Consistently it is seen as God's doing. "It is the gift of God. No man is able to work it in himself. It is a work of omnipotence."⁸⁶ By the same token, Wesley feels that at times the giving of faith occurs in a moment of irresistible grace. However, it can be resisted before and after the giving of justifying grace.⁸⁷

It is concerning the relationship of prevenient grace to faith that Rogers differs from other Wesleyan scholars, and more precisely expresses Wesley's position. Other scholars say that through prevenient grace man is able to stop resisting or to accept offers of grace and faith. Rogers sees prevenient grace as only the first step, providing man's conscience, and in no way does it lead directly to his ability to accept faith. Although a subtle difference, it is significant. This grace only leads to a man's being able to choose repentance and works of

⁸⁶ Wesley, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 5 ("An Earnest Appeal To Men of Reason and Religion"). This tract reiterates the same idea, see pp. 14, 49, 99-100. See also p. 392 ("Answer to the Rev. Mr. Church"); Vol. X, p. 307 ("Letter to a Gentleman at Bristol" January 6, 1758) and Vol. XIII, p. 499 ("Conversation with the Bishop of Bristol").

⁸⁷ Ibid., Vol. VI, pp. 280-81. One of Wesley's most explicit statements on the giving of faith occurs in his Journal (Works, Vol. I, pp. 426-7, August 24, 1743) and identically in his "Calvinistic Controversy" (Works, Vol. XIII, p. 508): "I believe, that the grace which brings faith, and thereby salvation, into the soul, is irresistible at that moment. That most believers may remember some time when God did irresistibly convince them of sin. That most believers do at some other times, find God irresistibly acting upon their souls. Yet I believe, that the grace of God, both before and after those moments, may be, and hath been, resisted; and that, in general, it does not act irresistibly, but we may comply therewith, or may not." While this passage comes from Wesley's early period, it appears to be representative of his later thought. See also Granville C. Henry, "John Wesley's Doctrine of Free Will" in London Quarterly and Holborn Review, Vol. 185, p. 201. Cf. Wesley, Works, Vol. X, pp. 204. 254 ("Predestination Calmly Considered") also Vol. X, p. 363 ("Thoughts Upon God's Sovereignty").

repentance, during which God may give the gift of faith. Thus, God's sovereignty is not in question. Man has choice and responsibility but not at the level that makes him morally capable of willing God, or effecting his own salvation by meeting conditions that act as a binding contract on God. Man's choice operates only in the way of putting him in a position where God may confer faith, and this faith is not meritorious.

When God gives faith, justification (pardon) is instantaneous. Man is seen by God as righteous.⁸⁸ At the same instant, regeneration, the real change in man begins. This is what Wesley termed "evangelical repentance," and again prevenient grace makes possible repentance in the believer, leading to fruits of repentance and serving as the means for increased faith, and further preventing grace.⁸⁹ "The notion of prevenient grace as energy enabling action is a significant aspect of the nature and role of prevenient grace in relation to both unregenerate and regenerate man."⁹⁰

From the time of regeneration, sanctification begins.⁹¹ Wesley sees it both an instantaneous and gradual.⁹² There are moments of cleansing,

⁸⁸Justification, Wesley says is what "God does for us, in forgiving our sins" as opposed to the new birth, the work "God does in us, in renewing our fallen nature." (Works, Vol. VI, p. 65, Sermon XLV, "The New Birth"). See also Vol. V, p. 169, p. 156.

⁸⁹Wesley, Works, Vol. V, p. 164 (Sermon XIV "Repentance of Believers"). See Works, Vol. VI, p. 49 (Sermon XLIII "The Scripture Way of Salvation"), also Vol. V, p. 154 (Sermon XIII "Sin in Believers") where Wesley describes the power of sin in the Christian growing "weaker and weaker." Cf. Rogers, op. cit., pp. 252, 254, 261.

⁹⁰Rogers, op. cit., p. 257.

⁹¹Wesley, Works, Vol. VI, p. 45 (Sermon XLIII, "The Scripture Way of Salvation") also p. 65.

⁹²Ibid., p. 509 (Sermon LXXXV, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation").

as in justification, when God gives the faith which is the condition, but there is the constant need to grow in grace, the grace which makes it possible to work out one's own salvation.⁹³

Clearly Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace speaks to the issue of slavery from several perspectives, affecting the question both in regard to the nature of the slave and the nature of the slave owner. Regarding the former, as indicated above Wesley's view of human depravity coupled with his concept of grace suggests the inherent worth of man, of every individual. Since the atonement makes all men the recipients of prevenient grace it follows that all men are of infinite, inherent worth. The enslaving of human beings is antithetical to such an attitude regarding their value.

Regarding the nature of the slave owner, of major significance is the fact that Wesley taught that every human being possesses a conscience. God has "re-inscribed" the moral law on man's heart, universally. Wesley concurs with Hutcheson that conscience may include a "public sense," whereby man are "pained at the misery of a fellow-creature, and pleased at his deliverance from it," and a "moral sense," whereby man "approves of benevolence and disapproves of cruelty."⁹⁴ Therefore, so great an evil as slavery cannot be dismissed on the grounds that men are ignorant of right and wrong, or devoid of feelings; no christian or non-christian can claim such excuses. In his "Thoughts Upon Slavery" Wesley reminded men that slavery could not "be reconciled (setting the Bible out of the question) with any degree of either mercy or justice."⁹⁵ Because of prevenient grace,

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Wesley, Works, Vol. VII, p. 189. Wesley takes issue with Hutcheson on the source of these senses. Hutcheson posits that they are natural to man, Wesley, that they are supernaturally given.

⁹⁵Ibid., Vol. XI, p. 70.

all men had a sense of mercy and justice. Likewise, no man could feign blindness to such a graphic need for benevolence. Apparently it was this conviction that caused Wesley to appeal to those directly involved with slavery: "Whether Christian or no, show yourself a man!"⁹⁶ It is significant that throughout "Thoughts Upon Slavery," he appealed more to something benevolent in man than he did to fear of retribution. Years earlier Hutcheson had posited that the benevolence within man was deeply affronted by slavery.⁹⁷ Unquestionably, it was Wesley's concept of prevenient grace that provided the basis for his belief in man's benevolence.⁹⁸ It is interesting to note that by comparison, Granville Sharp appealed more to man's fear of judgment than he did to man's benevolence.

Further, the universality of prevenient grace has implications for slavery particularly related to Christians' involvement in slavery. The doctrine asserts that the atonement is unlimited; any man, all men can be saved. It follows logically that Christians have the responsibility to communicate God's love to all men, and Wesley posited that an effective way of doing this was through good works done for one's neighbour. This is seen clearly in his sermon on "Free Grace" in which he stated that predestination destroys a major motive for good works:

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 79.

⁹⁷Rice, The Rise and Fall of Black Slavery, pp. 163-170. Rice is referring to Hutcheson's System of Moral Philosophy.

⁹⁸Wesley's prevenient grace as a basis for benevolence stands in contrast to Burke's basis for empathy. Burke posited that man had a capacity for delighting in others' hardships. Without this strange sort of "pleasure," man would totally avoid others in difficulty and have no ability to empathize, no capacity for benevolence. See Davis, The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture, pp. 356-9.

This uncomfortable doctrine directly tends to destroy our zeal for good works. And this it does, first, as it naturally tends . . . to destroy our love to the greater part of mankind, namely, the evil and unthankful. For whatever lessens our love, must so far lessen our desire to do them good. This it does, secondly, as it cuts off one of the strongest motives to all acts of bodily mercy, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and the like, - viz., the hope of saving their souls from death. For what avails it to relieve their temporal wants, who are just dropping into eternal fire? ⁹⁹

This sermon was Wesley's polemic against the doctrine of election (particularly George Whitefield's preaching of it). Whitefield did counter Wesley on the matter of good works saying ". . . it is the doctrine of election that most presses me to abound in good works."¹⁰⁰ He even went on to say that preaching may be "useful even to the non-elect, in restraining them from much wickedness and sin."¹⁰¹ But Whitefield's major argument was that some are elected to do good works, as part of God's pre-ordained plan of securing the elect.¹⁰² It is obvious that Wesley realised the practical outgrowth of such a view; motivationally, it would be a deterrent. As Paul S. Sanders points out, Wesley thought he saw the end result of Calvin's logic among his Calvinist contemporaries who strongly opposed any emphasis on good works.¹⁰³ Thus, with every

⁹⁹ Wesley, Works, Vol. VII, pp. 378-9.

¹⁰⁰ Whitefield's published letter to Wesley in response to "Free Grace," December 24, 1740, printed in Dallimore, George Whitefield, Vol. II, pp. 564-5 (entire letter is quoted on pp. 552-69).

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.556.

¹⁰² Ibid., passim.

¹⁰³ Paul S. Sanders, "What God Hath Joined Together" Religion in Life, Vol. XXIX, 1959-60 (Autumn, 1960) p. 498. Sanders goes on to say that Wesley considered his struggle with Calvinist antinomians to be more important than that with predestinarians because unconditional election as an opinion could be tolerated, but Christian holiness could not be opposed by true Christians. As will be developed below, good works (a fully social dimension) was integral to Wesley's concept of holiness.

slave a potential believer, it was incumbent upon Christians to do acts of mercy for them in hopes of leading them to salvation. These works included all help to the destitute slave, even to removing his chains. It is interesting to note also that Wesley did not universally condemn those who had never heard the gospel.¹⁰⁴ While he did not finally declare himself on whether they were saved or lost, he did posit that they had prevenient grace, and probably would be judged according to how they lived in the light they had.¹⁰⁵ The significance of Wesley's view of heathen is that it would strongly oppose any form of trusteeship. His positing that the natives do have God's light to some degree clearly suggests that he would even oppose more radical forms of conversionism, those which condoned almost any means in order to justify the end of converting heathen (e.g., Ramsay's extreme view, as well as that of Knox and Habersham). Wesley thought the converting of heathen was important, as seen by his early sending of missionaries to the West Indies. But because of prevenient grace he did not view it as unequivocally essential to their salvation, and thus worth any price to them. They were not dependent on the white man as a mediator, but upon God, whose Spirit had already touched them through prevenient grace.

Without doubt, Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace helped to lay a foundation for antislavery thought by addressing the nature of the slave (he was of equal worth to the slave owner), the nature of the slave owner (he could discern right from wrong, and had a capacity for benevolence), and the nature of Christianity (it seeks to convert all men by doing good to them).

¹⁰⁴ Wesley, Works, Vol. VII, p. 48 (Sermon XCI "On Charity") and p. 353 (Sermon CXXV "On Living Without God").

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 197 (Sermon CVI "On Faith"), p. 258 (Sermon CXIII "Walking By Sight and By Faith"), Vol. VI, p. 506 (Sermon LXXXV "Working Out Our Own Salvation"), and Vol. I (Journal, October 11, 1745).

III

FREE WILL

Frequently Wesley's concept of man's freedom has been misinterpreted and over simplified. This is understandable because throughout his works can be found statements that appear to support two positions, that man does and does not have free will. For example the following statements seem to reject any notion of free will:

"Such is the freedom of his will; free only to evil; free to 'drink in iniquity like water;' to wander farther and farther from the living God, and do more 'despite [injury] to the Spirit of grace!" 106

"But, indeed, both Mr. F[letcher] and Mr. W[esley] absolutely deny natural free will. We both steadily assert that the will of man is by nature free only to evil." (written by Wesley) 107

On the other hand, Wesley asserts:

"Indeed, if man were not free, he could not be accountable either for his thoughts, words, or actions. If he were not free, he would not be capable either of reward or punishment; he would be incapable either of virtue or vice, of being either morally good or bad." 108

And again,

"For he made you free agents; having an inward power of self-determination, which is essential to your nature. And he deals with you as free agents from first to last." 109

In a letter he instructs:

"We cannot impute too much to divine Providence, unless we make it interfere with our free-agency." 110

¹⁰⁶ Wesley, Works, Vol. V, p. 104 (Sermon IX "The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption").

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., Vol. X, p. 392 ("Some Remarks on Mr. Hill's Review of All the Doctrines Taught By Mr. John Wesley").

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 227 (Sermon LVIII "On Predestination").

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 311 (Sermon LXVI "The Signs of the Times").

¹¹⁰ Wesley, Letters, Vol. VI, p. 263 (To Miss March, April, 1777).

The difficulty of accepting either approach at face value is that neither fully correlates with the rest of Wesley's theology. If man is totally depraved, with his freedom completely destroyed, there is no room for accountability beyond Adam. All of his descendents can only follow the course of sin which is irreversibly programmed by Adam's choice. Wesley did not fully believe this, but felt that every man would be condemned not for Adam's sin, but for his own sinful activity.¹¹¹

On the other hand, the contrasting position that man is free simply to choose God and avoid sin, nullifies the reality and influence of human depravity, and Wesley held unwaveringly to man's moral inability due to his depravity.

Wesley's theology does not align with either of these positions, and in fact his above-mentioned statements are not contradictory. To understand their true meaning and compatibility, they must be seen in the context of his overall perspective of free will, in relation to man before the fall, man as totally depraved, man under prevenient grace, and regenerate man.

According to Wesley, man before the fall had complete freedom of the will. He could choose either good or evil and act in congruence with that choice. This freedom was part of man's capacity from being created in the moral image of God.¹¹² However, after the fall, man was totally

¹¹¹ Wesley, Works, Vol. IX, p. 315 ("The Doctrine of Original Sin"): "I believe none ever did, or ever will, die eternally, merely for the sin of our first father." See also, Vol. X, p. 223 ("Predestination Calmly Considered").

¹¹² Ibid., Vol. X, p. 350 ("Remarks On a Defence of Aspasio Vindicated"), Vol. VI, p. 270: "He was endued with a will, with various affections; (which are only the will exerting itself various ways;) that he might love, desire, and delight in that which is good: Otherwise, his understanding had been to no purpose. He was likewise endued with liberty; a power of choosing what was good, and refusing what was not so. Without this, both the will and the understanding would have been utterly useless. Indeed, without liberty, man had been so far from being a free agent, that he could have been no agent at all. For every unfree being is purely passive; not active in any degree." (Sermon LXII "The End of Christ's Coming").

depraved, and no longer retained the moral image of God (including knowledge, righteousness and holiness) which was the basis of his true freedom. Citing the Articles of the Church of England, Wesley noted;

"The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength and good works to faith and calling upon God. Wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us" 113

Clearly, man had lost the ability to choose good, to choose God. Of his own volition he could not (did not have the capacity to) do that which was pleasing (of merit) to God. In other areas (non-moral) however, man was not a mere puppet.

Wesley strongly opposed the idea of a mechanistic universe. Man was not determined in all things, but in spite of the fall, retained a remnant of God's image: ". . . a spiritual nature, endued with understanding, and affections, and a degree of liberty; of self-moving, yea, and self governing power (otherwise we were mere machines; stocks and stones)"¹¹⁴ While the moral image of God in man was destroyed, and freedom in moral issues was lost with it, the natural image of God was not completely destroyed in man. As part of the natural image, man continued to have some freedom ". . . in the power of self-motion, understanding, will, and liberty, [wherein] the natural image of God consisted."¹¹⁵

¹¹³Ibid., Vol. VIII, pp. 52-3 ("A Farther Appeal To Men of Reason and Religion," quoting Article X of the Church of England Articles).

¹¹⁴Ibid., Vol. VII, p. 345 (Sermon CXXIV "The Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels"); also, pp. 227-8. (Sermon CIX "What is Man?").

¹¹⁵Ibid., Vol. VI, pp. 242-3 (Sermon LX "The General Deliverance"); Rogers, op. cit., p. 190, concurs with this interpretation of Wesley.

Wesley contested determinism on the grounds that it undermined man's dignity.¹¹⁶ In his "Thoughts Upon Necessity," he challenged Jonathan Edwards (of New England) as well as the relatively new theories of stimulus/response determinism. He felt that Edwards did not allow man a freedom of his will, but did allow a freedom of actions, thus attempting to make man responsible. Wesley asserted that men's actions are guided by their wills, and if the latter are determined, "they are no more blamable for that will, than for the actions which follow it. There is no blame if they are under a necessity of willing."¹¹⁷ Regarding the theories that the human brain reacted to sensory stimuli in prescribed ways, and thus all of life was part of a great and unchangeable chain of events, Wesley stated that this made God the "author" of all the evil in the world.¹¹⁸ He refused to "believe the noblest creature in the visible world to be only a fine piece of clock-work."¹¹⁹ Like Granville Sharp, he argued that there was a degree of volition (principle of action) within man.¹²⁰ Man's feeling of having some self-determining power was not mere illusion, some great cosmic deception, but was rooted in truth.

It is helpful to realise that Wesley's argument against determinism was in the context of his battle against predestination. One of his main contentions against that doctrine was that it removed man's responsibility

¹¹⁶ Ibid., Vol. X, p. 475 ("A Thought On Necessity").

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 467 ("Thoughts Upon Necessity").

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 463.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 457.

¹²⁰ Ibid., Vol. VII, p. 227. Sharp's view of man's freedom is best expressed in his Tract: The Law of Nature and Principles of Action in Man. See Appendix one, part II.

for his actions. At the same time, Wesley completely subscribed to man's helplessness to merit anything good, i.e., leading to his own salvation. Thus, in speaking of man in practical, non-theological terms, he allowed him total freedom "in things of an indifferent nature;" but when speaking soteriologically of depraved man, he stated that he had no freedom to do good.¹²¹

It is in the context of man's inability to initiate any moral good, any action that has merit with God, that Wesley's strongest statements against free will occurred. Unequivocally he maintained that ". . . since the fall, no child of man has a natural power to choose anything that is truly good."¹²² In arguing with those who held election, and posited that man has a "natural liberty," Wesley said:

But I do not carry free-will so far: (I mean, not in moral things:) Natural free-will, in the present state of mankind, I do not understand¹²³

Clearly, he rejected the concept of natural free will in moral issues.

How then could fallen man, incapacitated by his inherited depravity, be held responsible? At this point it is helpful to see Wesley's view of human freedom in three levels. The lowest level, that of bodily movement, and "things of an indifferent nature," he feels everyone has, as part of the remnant of being created in the natural image of God. This level is natural, and has no relationship to interpersonal relationships or salvation. The second, or intermediate level has to do with

¹²¹Ibid., Vol. X, p. 350 ("Remarks on a Defence of Aspasio Vindicated") Chiles (op. cit., p. 440) concurs: ". . . man, in Wesley's view, is wholly depraved. His original freedom is lost and his will paralyzed so that he is unable to will salvation."

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid., p. 229 ("Predestination Calmly Considered").

moral choices, and thus relates to man's accountability, but it does not have to do with the kind of "good" that has merit for salvation. This level of freedom was lost in the fall, but has been universally restored by prevenient grace. It is not "natural" in that it cannot be experienced apart from God's grace; and yet because of the atonement, it is a part of every man's life. The highest level of freedom is only possible for regenerate man, those who have exercised their moral freedom, (made possible by prevenient grace) and chosen God's meritorious work (by Christ's merit) to be done in their lives to the point of sanctification. They are now free to work with God, and continue allowing God to work "good" in their lives, not for the purpose of merit, or salvation (that is accomplished), but for the working of God's will in the world. Man before the fall had all of these levels of freedom. Man after the fall has the lowest level by nature, and the intermediate level by grace. He cannot will good or gain merit by his choices (even by prevenient grace) but he can choose to not block God's grace in his life but let God apply the merit of Christ. Man who thus uses the freedom he has been given in prevenient grace is renewed (in sanctification) in God's image, and regains (at least theoretically) the moral freedom lost in the fall, the highest level of freedom.

It is in regard to the second level that Wesley refers when he says

I only assert, that there is a measure of free-will supernaturally restored to every man, together with that supernatural light which 'enlightens every man that cometh into the world.' 124

In this passage can be seen the relationship between free will and prevenient grace, as Wesley consistently speaks of this grace as that

¹²⁴ Wesley, Works, Vol. X, p. 229 ("Predestination Calmly Considered"). An almost identical passage occurs in Wesley's "Remarks on Mr. Hill's Review," Vol. X, p. 392.

which enlightens men. The relationship is also seen in the following passage where Wesley clarifies that prevenient grace does not nullify the effects of depravity to the point that man can now do good in a moral and meritorious way, but he can choose God's assistance:

. . . although I have not an absolute power over my own mind, because of the corruption of my own nature yet, through the grace of God assisting me, I have a power to choose and do good, as well as evil. I am free to choose whom I will serve; and if I choose the better part, to continue therein even unto death. 125

In his "Thoughts Upon Necessity," we see a more complete description of the process of the intricate working of prevenient grace and free will. After arguing that the truth of God's omnipotence does not depend on man's helplessness in "a train of causes and effects, [which] are necessarily fixed,"¹²⁶ he suggests that God's power is able to short circuit the deterministic process that man himself set in motion. Because God's power is guided by his love, he not only can but will intervene:

Yes, the strongest reason in the world, supposing that God is love; more especially, suppose he 'is loving to every man,' and that 'his mercy is over all his works.' If so, it cannot be, that he should see the noblest of his creatures under heaven necessitated to evil, and incapable of any relief but from himself, without affording that relief. 127

The intervention begins in the form of prevenient grace which universally gives man conscience:

It is undeniable, that he has fixed in man, in every man, his umpire, conscience; an inward judge, which passes sentence both on his passions and actions, either

¹²⁵Ibid., Vol. VII, pp. 228-9 (Sermon CIX "What is Man?"). Cf. Rogers, op. cit., p. 229.

¹²⁶Ibid., Vol. X, p. 460 ("Thoughts Upon Necessity").

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 473. See also pp. 478-9.

approving or condemning them. ¹²⁸

However, Wesley is quick to clarify that the problem of depravity is not simply solved by conscience. Man still does not have within himself adequate power over sin: "Indeed it [conscience] has not power to remove what it condemns; it shows the evil which it cannot cure."¹²⁹ Here we see that according to Wesley, man's will has not been freed to the extent that it can will the ultimate good, that it can directly will God. But it has been freed by prevenient grace so that it can stop willing evil (the chains are broken that connect it involuntarily to the process of evil), and submit to God's activity. God's action on man's will allows man to choose to let God work the good in his life:

But the God of power can cure it [that which conscience has condemned]; and the God of love will, if we choose he should. ¹³⁰

The process here stated is consistent with the soteriological process described above (in the preceding section), wherein man cannot choose faith, he can only choose to repent and then do works of repentance, whence God then bestows the gift of faith, which is the condition of salvation. Here man can choose, not the good, but to allow God to do his work of Good in man's life. Thus man's responsibility is maintained, but not at the expense of God's sovereignty.

In his sermon "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," Wesley again explains how grace works in man, making him free to allow God to work in his life, with the result being regeneration and the renewed freedom

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 474.

¹³⁰ Ibid. (*italics mine*)

that enables good works:

Every one has, sooner or later, good desires; although the generality of men stifle them before they can strike deep root, or produce any considerable fruit. Every one has some measure of that light, some faint glimmering ray, which, sooner or later, more or less, enlightens every man that cometh into the world. And every one, unless he be one of the small number whose conscience is seared as with a hot iron, feels more or less uneasy when he acts contrary to the light of his own conscience. So that no man sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace which he hath.

Therefore, inasmuch as God works in you, you are now able to work out your own salvation. 131

And at this point, man's accountability takes on a dimension beyond his own individual salvation because to "work out your own salvation" involves doing works of repentance which include works of mercy to one's neighbour as well as works of piety (related to meditation and scripture).¹³²

In the same passage Wesley makes clear that because of grace giving all men a measure of freedom, they cannot complacently remain in sin and "lay the blame upon their Maker, by saying, 'It is God only that must quicken us'"¹³³

¹³¹Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 512 (Sermon LXXXV "On Working Out Our Own Salvation").

¹³²Rogers concurs that prevenient grace enables man to do the works of repentance, both works of mercy and works of piety. (Rogers, op. cit., p. 195). In "Predestination Calmly Considered," Wesley makes the strong case that without God's grace it would be impossible for man to do the outward works of mercy for his neighbour (feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, cover the naked), or if he did them they would only serve to condemn him because his motive would not be right. But man does not have this excuse, for he does have enabling grace for such action. (Vol. X, pp. 221-2).

¹³³Wesley, Works, Vol. VI, p. 512 (Sermon LXXXV "On Working Out Our Own Salvation").

In the context of prevenient grace Wesley can say that God

. . . made you free agents; having an inward power of self-determination, which is essential to your nature. And he deals with you as free agents from first to last. As such, you may shut or open your eyes as you please. You have sufficient light shining all around you; yet you need not see it unless you will.¹³⁴

Wesley consistently argues that man's being held accountable demands that he have free will (the aspect we have termed the intermediate level). He reasons that all men feel a sense of responsibility, religion posits a judgment with both rewards and punishments, all of which could not be without man's having the "measure of free will" made possible by grace.¹³⁵ It is this level of free will that allows the greatest shame and guilt to come on man for his sin. Although he cannot will good, he no longer is totally programmed to will evil. He can will to allow God to do good in him and in that sense, ". . . cast away all /his/ transgressions: Therefore, if we do not, they are chargeable on ourselves. We may live; but we will die."¹³⁶

¹³⁴Ibid., p.311 (Sermon LXVI "The Signs of the Times").

¹³⁵Ibid., p.227 (Sermon LVIII "On Predestination") and p. 270 (Sermon LXII "The End of Christ's Coming"). See also Vol. X, "Thoughts Upon Necessity," pp. 457-74. Man's awareness that he could, but does not do better causes him to feel pain, remorse and guilt (Vol. X, p. 465). That judgment implies responsibility is found in Works, Vol. X, pp. 223-4, 234, 363, 463-4.

¹³⁶Ibid., Vol. IX, p. 275 ("The Doctrine of Original Sin"), italics Wesley's. Similarly, Cushman describes man's condition as follows: "It is not that man has not grace and, therefore, is corrupt (Calvinism). It is that despite grace, he continues to rebel." (Cushman, op. cit., p. 111) Cushman describes the relationship of grace to man's will: man "recognizes the contradiction between his will and a good of which he is aware but cannot willingly affirm. He is the man who is in degree disquieted by his sin but cannot conquer it. But the tension is itself the ground of hope, for it unsettles man in his self-reliance and may at length reduce him to despair, that zero-point of the will whence comes the imperceptible transition from man's futile working to God's working." The result is the "inactivation of the will through despair," which is "not the work of man but the death of man's working." (Ibid., pp. 113, 115.)

On the other hand, the result of using for good this level of freedom (made possible by prevenient grace) is that man can experience God's work of regeneration. It is in this relationship that man's level of freedom yet increases. Wesley states:

. . . that our Christian liberty . . . is really nothing but the grace of God preventing us, growing up with us, and accompanying us all along, to all the stages of our life: nor ought we therefore to think it a consequence of our nature, when it is really of our spiritual birth.¹³⁷

Commenting on Wesley's remarks, Rogers says: "The immediate presence of the Holy Spirit with man is the source of that grace which restores freedom to man. Wesley wants to be very clear that it is grace, not nature, that is the foundation of liberty of regenerate man."¹³⁸

Again Wesley associates freedom with regeneration when he says: "A man is not free till he is regenerated by baptism, which repairs the ruins of his decayed nature, and once more leaves him at his own liberty, in the hands of his own counsel."¹³⁹ It should be here noted that this passage reflects Wesley's early idea of the process of regeneration (i.e., through baptism) which changed after 1738. However, the results of regeneration remain consistent. The strength and liberty that come from regeneration help ". . . so that when afterward we hear arguments for our duty, they pierce deeper into our mind, than it was possible they should, while there was such a thick film of corruption about our hearts."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Wesley, unpublished manuscript sermon on Phil. 2:12-13, p. 85. This is one of two sermons that Wesley preached on this text. Both sermons were adapted (predominantly copied) from William Tilly, Sixteen Sermons, (London, 1712).

¹³⁸ Rogers, op. cit., p. 128. See also Wesley, Works, Vol. V, pp. 109-10 (Sermon XVII "The Circumcision of the Heart").

¹³⁹ Wesley, MS Sermon, Phil. 2:12-13. p. 88.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

The result is that "we are enabled to move without any other help some of the first steps toward amendment."¹⁴¹ Conscious of the conflict between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man Wesley adds: "This doctrine neither dishonours the grace of God, nor does too much honour to nature, in that it supposes nature to work only in the power and efficacy of grace itself."¹⁴²

While it is tempting (and often done) to force Wesley's thought into a consistent system, the attempt here has been to represent him honestly and accurately. But it should be added that while some of his statements do not appear to be compatible with others, the perspective that must be kept in mind is Wesley's purpose. When speaking of man's responsibility, he consistently speaks of man's capability under grace. When speaking of man's total dependence upon God, he reflects man's inability. As Chiles has pointed out, "Wesley was not driven by a need for logical consistency, to establish a neat correspondence between man's obligation and his ability. . . . Man for him is responsible, even though not free to the good; he is wholly without merit, when, empowered by preventing grace, he submits to God."¹⁴³

While it is true that Wesley did not always try to reconcile what appear to be mutually exclusive statements, it is equally true that he was constant in always maintaining two threads throughout his teaching

¹⁴¹Ibid., pp. 85-6.

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 86.

¹⁴³Chiles, op. cit., p. 448. On p.440 Chiles gives the helpful comment that Wesley "was quite content, on the basis of scripture and experience, to affirm both that God does everything in salvation, and that man is responsible for his own salvation. It is being quite true to Wesley simply to state this tension between divine initiative and human responsibility and let it stand."

on free will: God is sovereign, and man is responsible. Unequivocally he held that God is in complete control, but this in no way could be allowed to diminish man's responsibility through determinism.

One attempted resolution to the apparent conflict can be seen in Wesley's "Thoughts Upon God's Sovereignty." Here he posits that God is revealed "under a two-fold character:" creator and governor. His sovereignty is exercised when he acts as creator; it is in these times that his dealing with men is irresistible. His justice and mercy (particularly when "mercy rejoices over justice") can be seen when he acts as Governor.¹⁴⁴ Madron observes that in his concept of God as creator, Wesley came closest to the Calvinists, while in speaking of God as governor he diverted most from them.¹⁴⁵ Certainly the posing of these aspects of God was Wesley's partial answer to the problem of freedom. Man could have a measure of freedom with God maintaining his sovereignty because it was God who voluntarily chose to limit his dealings with men.

In summary it can be said that Wesley really did posit a kind of free will, what we might term a conditional or indirect free will. While direct free will was lost in the fall, prevenient grace begins to restore the process of man's having indirect free will. By this grace man is able to recognise good and evil for what they are, he is unable to choose the good, but able to choose God's help through God's regenerative work; following this he is enabled to allow God to work in him, so he can work. Man's freedom, even by prevenient grace is not sufficient for

¹⁴⁴ Wesley, Works, Vol. X, pp. 361-63 ("Thoughts Upon God's Sovereignty").

¹⁴⁵ Madron, "The Political Thought of John Wesley," p. 36.

him to independently choose and do the good. That was the experience of Adam alone. Thus, it cannot be said simply that prevenient grace restores man's freedom.¹⁴⁶ It restores only enough freedom for man to be held accountable in that it makes God's resources available to man. It is best understood in stewardship terms. Man does not have perfect freedom in a possessive sense, but he has freedom to have access to freedom. He can use the freedom he has to allow God to prepare him for increased freedom. Thus for Wesley there was no unqualified free will. Where he does speak of free will without qualifying it in terms of prevenient grace it is conceivable that he was simply referring to the potential end result, without reiterating the whole process of prevenient grace and regeneration. He might well do this because of his conviction of the universality of prevenient grace. It could easily be misunderstood as "natural" because no one was without it, but it was in fact, a supernatural gift.¹⁴⁷

While Wesley's concept of free will is debatable regarding the degree of free will man actually has, it is beyond question that Wesley believed that every man has sufficient free will (made possible by prevenient grace) to be held accountable for his own spiritual state. That fact has direct implications on the question of slavery.

¹⁴⁶ This is the oversimplification most often stated in regard to Wesley's doctrine of free will. See Rogers, op. cit., pp. 16-17.

¹⁴⁷ Some of the numerous places where Wesley refers to man's freedom without qualifying it occur in his Works, Vol. VI, p. 326, Vol. VII, pp. 240, 229. One of the most graphic pictures of man having the ability to choose God occurs in "Predestination Calmly Considered," Vol. X, pp. 232-3, but because of Wesley's overall perspective, it must be viewed in the context of prevenient grace.

The system of black slavery in the eighteenth century made one man the property and responsibility of another. A slave owner could and did control not only the availability of his slaves' physical necessities, but also their educational and spiritual development. This could work for or against the slaves' welfare. They could be kept in the worst conditions and deprived of all spiritual or educational light. If however, the owner was a Christian and considered the spiritual welfare of the slaves, it could lead to improved conditions and attempts to christianise the slaves. In fact, making them responsible to another human being could be justified on the grounds that the white Christian (owner) served in a kind of mediating capacity between the inferior black man and God. This kind of thinking would be a good foundation for later trusteeship attitudes and policies.¹⁴⁸ Regardless, the point being made here is that slavery removed the responsibility from the slave. The system made him totally dependent on his master. He was responsible to another man rather than to God. Predestination (of the eighteenth century variety that Wesley so strongly opposed) need not necessarily oppose slavery as it held that man was not really spiritually responsible anyway. Theoretically, a system that removed man's responsibility to God was irrelevant in a context of theological determinism which already denied the existence of that responsibility.

By contrast Wesley's idea of free will (even though limited to the first steps of repentance), meant that every man was completely responsible for his own spiritual condition. Another could not justly usurp that authority. Wesley opposed slavery on the principle of protecting the

¹⁴⁸ The Codrington Estates of the S.P.G. are an example of an attempt to justify the institution of slavery as a means of christianising. Wesley would have opposed such reasoning, being guided by principles rather than pragmatic results.

measure of free will every man had by prevenient grace. His concept of freedom allowed a man to become fully responsible to himself and to God. A man must have the external freedom to do what his internal freedom directs.¹⁴⁹ Any system that blurred a man's awareness of his responsibility to God, or that hindered his acting on that responsibility was antithetical to all the principles of Christianity. Slavery was undeniably such a system. It is interesting to note that Thomas Clarkson used this very argument in his opposition to slavery.¹⁵⁰

A second implication is actually a further development of a principle implicit in the doctrine of prevenient grace. As noted above, prevenient grace is responsible for man's conscience, thus no man can take part in an evil (especially so great an evil as slavery) and not be conscious of his wrong.¹⁵¹ However, man's measure of free will implies that man is capable not only of recognising such evil, but also of not participating in it, or, positively, of doing good in opposition to the evil. This "good" must be qualified. In spite of grace, man is still depraved and therefore he is much more prone to evil than to good.¹⁵² While he does not possess any ability to do works of a meritorious nature, prevenient grace enables him to discern good from evil,

¹⁴⁹ It is at the point of man's having the right of freedom to obey God and his conscience that Wesley defended the contemporary English political freedom. He felt that the constitutional monarchy met this imperative, and must always do so. See "Thoughts Upon Liberty," Works, Vol. XI, pp. 34ff.

¹⁵⁰ See Chapter III (Clarkson) p. 57.

¹⁵¹ This is not to say that every slave owner was operating in blatant opposition to his conscience. Undoubtedly. George Whitefield did not become a slave owner in defiance of his conscience, but he can be contrasted to Wesley in that Whitefield tolerated the possible evil of slavery in order to convert negroes. The same compromise was accepted by American Methodists in the late eighteenth century, as indicated in Chapter VII.

¹⁵² Wesley, Works, Vol. IX, pp. 223, 450.

and to choose the former in relation to his fellow man. All men, not just Christians have this choice. For Wesley, it is man's free will (by prevenient grace) that enables him to initiate works meet for repentance, including works of mercy to his neighbour.¹⁵³ Following justification, prevenient grace enables him to co-operate with God in doing an even higher good. Thus all men are capable of doing some degree of good for mankind. This is an ability that can bear directly on the horrific problem of slavery. According to Wesley's view of grace, man need not stand idly by, helpless in the face of gross injustice. At the very least, he can comply with the moral law of justice and mercy in his own relationships. Ability implied responsibility and Wesley preached this responsibility reminding men that the works of mercy done for or withheld from the hungry, thirsty, and naked were actually done for or withheld from Christ.¹⁵⁴ One cannot help but feel

¹⁵³ Ibid., Vol. VII, pp. 117-18 (Sermon XCVIII "On Visiting the Sick"): "Surely there are works of mercy, as well as works of piety, which are real means of grace." "'Inasmuch as ye have done it to the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.' If this do not convince you that the continuance in works of mercy is necessary to salvation, consider what the Judge of all says to those on the left hand: 'Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels'" "Is it not strange, that this important truth should be so little understood, or, at least, should so little influence the practice of them that fear God?" Also, Vol. VI, pp. 510ff (Sermon LXXXV "Working Out Our Own Salvation"); In this sermon works of mercy are seen as possible by prevenient grace, and as part of the whole process of salvation, from justification through sanctification. Also, Vol. VI, p. 51 (Sermon XLIII "The Scripture Way of Salvation"); Here Wesley was speaking of "works meet for repentance" in relation to a repentance unto full salvation, i.e., sanctification. But in the overall view of Wesley, prevenient grace freed unregenerate man's will to the extent that he could do works of mercy.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., Vol. X, p. 466. Wesley actually quotes the passage from Matthew 25 ("Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire") which immediately precedes the account of withholding merciful deeds from others in need, and therefore from Christ. The Matthew 25 passage is also used in "Predestination Calmly Considered," Vol. X, pp. 221-2.

that such works would not have been separated in Wesley's thinking from the plight of the degraded slaves.

Again, Wesley's doctrine of free will bears implications upon slavery both in light of the nature of the slave (every man is accountable to God and must be left to live responsibly), and in light of those on the other side of the issue, those in a position to oppose such oppression. According to Wesley, all men, and most especially Christians, have sufficient freedom to oppose evil. They are capable of doing works of mercy to their neighbours, and their ability makes them responsible for such acts.

IV

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

Christian perfection must be classified among the core doctrines of Wesley's theology and as his "most distinctive doctrinal emphasis."¹⁵⁵ In the last year of his life he stated that it was for the purpose of teaching perfection that God has appointed him and his followers; he saw the doctrine as "the grand depositum which God had lodged with the people called Methodists."¹⁵⁶ Having said that, one must clarify that for Wesley it was not simply "a doctrine," but it espoused the whole of Christianity, of religion. He saw perfection as inseparable from the body of Christian truth; it was integral. Williams rightly points out that ". . . perfection is simply the climax of Wesley's

¹⁵⁵ Frank Whaling, ed., John and Charles Wesley, Selected Writings and Hymns, with a Preface by Albert Outler, (London, 1981), p. xv.

¹⁵⁶ Wesley, Works, Vol. XIII, p. 9 (Letter to Robert Brackenbury, September 15, 1790).

limitless faith in God's grace that shines through every part of his theology. It is here that his theology comes to focus."¹⁵⁷

So central was this doctrine to all of his theology that Wesley used various terms interchangeably when referring to it. He could speak of "holiness," "perfection," "sanctification," "full salvation," "true religion," or "righteousness," and consistently use the same definition and description.¹⁵⁸ It was simply one of the "two branches" of salvation by faith ("justification and sanctification").¹⁵⁹ His concern was the content of the teaching more than the terminology, as reflected in his letter to William Dodd: "I have no particular fondness for the term "Christian Perfection". It seldom occurs either in my preaching or writings."¹⁶⁰ However, so essential were the truths Wesley associated with the doctrine of perfection that he asserted: "without

¹⁵⁷Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today, p. 168.

¹⁵⁸In fact, how Wesley described the "altogether Christian" in contrast to the "almost Christian" was in the same terms he used to describe the experience of perfection (the loving God and one's neighbour). See Wesley, Works, Vol. V, p. 21 "Sermon II, "The Almost Christian."

¹⁵⁹Wesley, Works, Vol. VI, p. 509 (Sermon LXXXV, "Working Out Our Own Salvation").

¹⁶⁰Wesley, Letters, Vol. III, p. 167 (1756). In reality, Wesley did often use the term "perfection," probably because it was scriptural, but from the various terms used with the same description, it is apparent that the content was more important to him than the term. It should also be pointed out that earlier in his ministry he considered and corresponded with his brother Charles about dropping the term. (See Wesley, Letters, Vol. V, pp. 93, 314) This was in 1768 and 1772, but as the years advanced his conviction to continue the term and the teaching strengthened.

being thus sanctified" one "cannot see the Lord."¹⁶¹

According to Wesley, sanctification was initiated at the moment of the new birth: ". . . at the same time that we are justified, yea, in that very moment, sanctification begins."¹⁶² In his sermon on "The New Birth," he explained the relationship of justification to the new birth:

In order of time, neither of these [justification and the new birth] is before the other; in the moment we are justified by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Jesus, we are also "born of the Spirit;" but in order of thinking, as it is termed, justification precedes the new birth. We first conceive his wrath to be turned away, and then his Spirit to work in our hearts.¹⁶³

But the new birth did serve as the "gate" or "entrance" to sanctification,¹⁶⁴ although the latter was "a distinct gift of God, and of a totally different nature."¹⁶⁵ It is interesting to note that Wesley described the "marks" of the new birth as faith, hope and love, the last of which becomes such an important aspect of his concept of perfection.¹⁶⁶

Like the new birth, sanctification is the gift of God, through faith: faith is "both the condition and instrument of it. When we begin to

¹⁶¹ Wesley, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 285 ("Minutes of Some Late Conversations," August 2, 1745). Although beyond the scope of the present study, an interesting comparison of Wesley's doctrine of perfection with the sixteenth century reformers is made by William R. Cannon in The Theology of John Wesley, pp. 222-227. Lawrence Wood posits that Wesley's doctrine of perfection as a second work of grace is really a re-interpretation of the Roman Catholic and Anglican rite of confirmation (Pentecostal Grace, Wilmore, Kentucky, 1980, pp. 240ff.).

¹⁶² Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 45 (Sermon XLIII "The Scripture Way of Salvation").

¹⁶³ Ibid., pp. 65-6 (Sermon XLV "The New Birth" italics his). Later in the sermon he again expresses: "When we are born again, then our sanctification, our inward and outward holiness, begins" (p. 74). See also Vol. VII, p. 205, Vol. VIII, p. 285, Vol. IX, p. 310.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 74.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 56 (Sermon V, "Justification by Faith").

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 212ff. (Sermon XVIII, "The Marks of the New Birth").

believe, then sanctification begins. And as faith increases, holiness increases, till we are created anew."¹⁶⁷ In fact, Wesley's description of how a person becomes sanctified is exactly parallel to his description of how one becomes justified. In his sermon "The Repentance of Believers," Wesley made clear that the way to holiness in the believer begins with repentance, just as the way to justification in the unbeliever does.¹⁶⁸ Sanctification, like justification comes only by faith, which is God's gift. In response to the question of how man waits for this gift, Wesley prescribed doing the "works of repentance," just as he did in the context of justification:

We wait . . . in universal obedience; in keeping all the commandments; in denying ourselves, and taking up our cross daily. These are the general means which God hath ordained for our receiving his sanctifying grace. The particular are, - prayer, searching the Scripture, communicating, and fasting. 169

He described these works more specifically in "The Scripture Way of Salvation," and included not only the ordinances but also service to one's fellow man:

But what good works are those, the practice of which you affirm to be necessary to sanctification? First, all works of piety; such as public prayer, family prayer, and praying in our closet; receiving the supper of the Lord; searching the Scriptures, by hearing, reading, meditating; and using such a measure of fasting or abstinence as our bodily health allows.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., Vol. VIII, p. 279 ("Minutes of Some Late Conversations").

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., Vol. V. pp. 156ff. (Sermon XIV) The same thought is seen in Sermon VII, "The Way to the Kingdom" in which Wesley describes "the kingdom of God" as "holiness and happiness, joined in one," and the first step to it, repentance (Vol. V, pp. 80-81). See also Sermon XLIII, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," where Wesley distinguishes between repentance preceding and following justification; the latter implies no guilt (Vol. VI, p. 50).

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., Vol. VIII, p. 286 ("Minutes of Some Late Conversations").

Secondly, all works of mercy; whether they relate to the bodies or souls of men; such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, entertaining the stranger, visiting those that are in prison, or sick, or variously afflicted; such as the endeavouring to instruct the ignorant, to awaken the stupid sinner, to quicken the lukewarm, to confirm the wavering, to comfort the feebleminded, to succour the tempted, or contribute in any manner to the saving of souls from death. This is the repentance, and these the "fruits meet for repentance" which are necessary to full sanctification. This is the way wherein God hath appointed his children to wait for complete salvation. 170

Maintaining that such works are not the earning of a spiritual state, but only the divinely appointed means of grace, Wesley explained the relationship of works and faith in regard to justification,

. . . both repentance, and fruits meet for repentance, are in some sense, necessary to justification. But they are not necessary in the same sense with faith, nor in the same degree. Not in the same degree; for those fruits are only necessary conditionally; if there be time and opportunity for them. Otherwise a man may be justified without them . . . but he cannot be justified without faith. 171

And in regard to sanctification:

. . . both this repentance and its fruits are necessary to full salvation; yet they are not necessary either in the same sense with faith, or in the same degree: - Not in the same degree; for these fruits are only necessary conditionally, if there be time and opportunity for them; otherwise a man may be sanctified without them. But he cannot be sanctified without faith. 172

Further clarifying the delicate difference between the concepts of earning, faith and obedience he said: "Probably the difference . . . lies in words chiefly. All who expect to be sanctified at all expect to be sanctified by faith. But meantime they know that faith will not be given but to them that obey. Remotely, therefore, the blessing depends on our works, although immediately on simple faith."¹⁷³ Man's

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 51.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 48. Italics his.

¹⁷² Ibid., pp. 51-2. Italics his.

¹⁷³ Wesley, Letters, Vol. IV, p. 71. The reader is referred to pp. 261-64 above (Prevenient Grace) for a more thorough explanation of Wesley's concept of the means of grace in receiving faith in the process of salvation.

effort has no merit because faith is the only condition, and ". . . sanctifying as well as justifying faith is the free gift of God."¹⁷⁴ Thus while sanctification begins with the new birth, it requires repentance subsequent to justification and usually the works of repentance during which the gift of faith for full sanctification is granted.

While sanctification happens by faith, it effects an actual moral change in the believer. As Cannon points out, from the beginning of sanctification at the point of justification, "a real moral similarity exists between Christians and their heavenly Father and . . . the weakest Christian man is capable of imitating the character of his Lord."¹⁷⁵ Certainly man's final salvation does not depend on his moral attainment, rather on God's grace, and yet this final salvation includes holiness, without which, Wesley asserts, no man shall see God.¹⁷⁶ In Wesley's words, sanctification is a "real change," while justification, or pardon, involves a "relative" change.¹⁷⁷ In another place he describes sanctification as what God works "in us by his Spirit," while justification is what "God does for us through his Son."¹⁷⁸ It is the righteousness of Christ (applied through justification) that "entitles" us to heaven, but "personal holiness," which "qualifies" us for it,¹⁷⁹ and it is the role

¹⁷⁴ Wesley, Works, Vol. XII, p. 333 (Letter to Mrs. A. F., October 12, 1764).

¹⁷⁵ Cannon, op. cit., p. 224.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 225. See Wesley, Works, Vol. X, p. 364.

¹⁷⁷ Wesley, Works, Vol. XI, p. 420 ("Plain Account of Christian Perfection").

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 56 (Sermon V "Justification by Faith") italics mine.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., Vol. VII, p. 314 (Sermon CXX "The Wedding Garment").

of the Holy Spirit to facilitate this change: "The title 'holy,' applied to the Spirit of God, does not only denote that he is holy in his own nature, but that he makes us so" ¹⁸⁰ The consequences are practical; while justification deals with the guilt of sin, sanctification affects the power of sin in the believer's life. ¹⁸¹

Because Wesley's doctrine of perfection involves both faith and ethical holiness, George Croft Cell has called his teaching a "synthesis of the Protestant ethic of grace with the Catholic ethic of holiness." ¹⁸² Undoubtedly Wesley's emphasis on moral attainment, actual holiness and the use of ordinances in anticipation of sanctification may easily be confused with a Roman Catholic system of merit, however the element of synthesis is completely absent because of Wesley's unequivocal insistence that faith is the only condition, and faith is God's free gift. Allbeck concludes that Wesley's emphasis was on faith active in good works, and "this is so thoroughly typical of Reformation theology that to designate it a synthesis of Protestant and Catholic positions constitutes a basic misunderstanding of the situation." ¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 486 (Sermon CXXXVIII "On Grieving the Holy Spirit").

¹⁸¹ Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 509 (Sermon LXXXV "Working Out Our Own Salvation"). See also Vol. V, p. 224, and VI, p. 65.

¹⁸² Cell, op. cit., p. 361. J. E. Rattenbury partially agrees, stating that Wesley attempted a synthesis, although he did not entirely succeed (The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns, London, 1941, p. 300). See also John L. Peters, Christian Perfection and American Methodism (New York, 1956), pp. 20-21.

¹⁸³ W. D. Allbeck, "Plenteous Grace With Thee Is Found," Religion in Life, XXIX, (Autumn, 1960), p. 503. Other Wesley scholars concur in opposing Cell's thesis. See Colin Williams, op. cit., pp. 174-5, 187. Gordon Rupp's comment is particularly insightful. Noting that Wesley's theology contains a "certain combination of Christian truths," he states that this ". . . has sometimes been explained by saying that John Wesley combined the Protestant teaching of justification by faith with the Catholic conception of holiness. I do not find this an enlightening statement at all. In England it is almost always made by people slightly ashamed of their Protestantism, and I do not think it bears close inspection. John Wesley perhaps was not a subtle theologian, but he was not a muddleheaded one. What he had to say about holiness was bound together

Wesley's description of the actual moral change which sanctification effects on the believer occurs throughout his writings. Although the relationship of perfection to the overall process of salvation was modified in Wesley's thinking after his Aldersgate experience, the idea of perfection and even his description of it pre-date 1738, and remain consistent to the end of his life.¹⁸⁴ In his "Plain Account of Christian Perfection," he gives a comprehensive description that includes the three particulars which occur frequently in his sermons and other writings: purity of intention, the renewed image of God in man, and loving God and neighbour. He states:

In one view, it is purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God. It is the giving God all our heart; it is one desire and design ruling all our tempers. It is the devoting, not a part, but all our soul, body,

(Footnote 183 continued from page 292)

with what he believed about justification by faith: it was not an after-thought, but the original starting point of his search for Christian perfection.

From beginning to end John Wesley believed and preached justification by faith only, despite all the aggravations and temptations of Protestant antinomians Nevertheless, it is true, as he put it, that holiness was his point. For him the Pauline doctrine of justification was closely linked with the Epistles of John and the doctrine of love." (Principalities and Powers, p. 82.).

¹⁸⁴In 1733 Wesley preached "The Circumcision of the Heart" before the University of Oxford. This was the first of his writings to be published. In this sermon he explained the characteristics of holiness or perfection. When he published his "Plain Account of Christian Perfection" in 1777, he commented on the content of that early sermon saying: "This was the view of religion I had, which even then I scrupled not to term perfection. This is the view I have of it now, without any material addition or diminution." (Wesley, Works, Vol. XI, p. 369). In 1765 he wrote: ". . . the sermon on the Circumcision of the Heart . . . contains all that I now teach concerning salvation from all sin and loving God with an undivided heart." (Wesley, Letters, Vol. IV, p. 299, to John Newton, 14 May, Londonderry).

and substance to God. In another view, it is all the mind which was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ walked. It is the circumcision of the heart from all filthiness, all inward as well as outward pollution. It is a renewal of the heart in the whole image of God, the full likeness of Him that created it. In yet another, it is the loving God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves. Now, take it in which of these views you please, (for there is no material difference,) and this is the whole and sole perfection . . . which I have believed and taught for these forty years, from the year 1725 to the year 1765. 185

Regarding the three elements of the definition, Rob Staples points out Wesley's debt to the devotional writers he had studied so diligently: from Jeremy Taylor, "purity of intention," from Thomas À Kempis, "the mind of Christ," and from William Law, "loving God and neighbour."¹⁸⁶ In Wesley's writings the idea of "purity of intention" usually occurs in the context of having "the mind of Christ," a result of man's being restored in the image of God. Another result of that restoration is perfect love.

For Wesley, one of the greatest tragedies of man's fall was that he lost completely the moral image of God, in which he had been created.¹⁸⁷ But the greatness of man's potential lay in the fact that this image is able to be restored. This possibility is seen in his earliest sermons; indeed in his unpublished sermon on Genesis 1:27 (1730) he spoke of the image of God being "reprinted" on the soul.¹⁸⁸ In later years while he

¹⁸⁵ Wesley, Works, Vol. XI, p. 444, italics mine.

¹⁸⁶ Rob Lyndal Staples, "John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection; A Reinterpretation," (unpublished Th.D. thesis, Pacific School of Religion, 1963), p. 10. See also Peters, op. cit., p. 21.

¹⁸⁷ See above (Total Depravity) pp. 238-39.

¹⁸⁸ Wesley, MS. Sermon on Genesis 1:27, p. 15.

described justification as what God does for us, and sanctification as what God does in us (as mentioned above), he also spoke of justification restoring us to God's favour, but sanctification restoring us to God's image.¹⁸⁹ And when he spoke thusly, Wesley had in mind the moral image of God, consisting of "righteousness and true holiness."¹⁹⁰

The picture of the restored image occurs repeatedly in Wesley's sermons:

Gospel holiness is no less than the image of God stamped upon the heart. 191

. . . by sanctification we are . . . restored to the image of God. 192

And in the "Sermon on the Mount, Discourse I," Wesley defined "righteousness" (for him, a synonym for perfection) as "the image of God stamped upon the heart, now renewed after the likeness of Him that created it."¹⁹³ The representation was used consistently when Wesley described or defined perfection.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹ Wesley Works, Vol. V, p. 56 (Sermon V, "Justification by Faith"), also, p. 224, (Sermon XIX "Privilege of Those That Are Born of God.") *italics, mine*).

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 414 (Sermon LXXVI "On Perfection"), also Vol. VIII, p. 279 ("Minutes of Some Late Conversations"), and Vol. V, p. 359 (Sermon XXVII, "Sermon on the Mount, Discourse VII") and Vol. VII, p. 346 (Sermon CXXIV, "The Christian's Treasure").

¹⁹¹ Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 71 (Sermon XLV "The New Birth"). Likewise, Sermon XII "The Witness of Our Own Spirit" states: "Holiness, a recovery of the image of God, a renewal of soul 'after his likeness'." (Vol. V, p. 141)

¹⁹² Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 509 (Sermon LXXXV "Working Out Our Own Salvation").

¹⁹³ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 256.

¹⁹⁴ The pervasiveness of this thought is seen in the extensive use of the phrase or its equivalent throughout the sermons and writings, some of which are here listed: Wesley, Works, Vol. V, pp. 70, 74, 86, 169, 184, 203, 241, 267, 269, 294, 363, 388-9, 402, 426 and 430.

Vol. VI, pp. 416, 422-3.

Vol. VII, pp. 230, 233, 346, 353, 430, 486, 491 and 513.

Vol. VIII, pp. 47, 48, 279 and 357.

Vol. IX, pp. 289, 308 and 313.

Vol. X, p. 364.

Vol. XI, pp. 378, 381, 424, 444 and 523.

Vol. XII, p. 416.

But the renewal of the image of God in man implied more for Wesley than merely a passive theological concept. It was active, because it was love. In fact, the two concepts (image of God, and love) come together in Wesley's statement that "the very image of the invisible God" is love.¹⁹⁵ He affirmed that Christians should aspire to "nothing more, but more of . . . love," they could go no higher than this.¹⁹⁶ This was "perfection;" "pure love filling the heart, and governing all the words and actions."¹⁹⁷ Among the numerous passages where Wesley identified perfection with love are the following:

But what is perfection? The word has various senses: Here it means perfect love. It is love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul. It is love "rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, in everything giving thanks." 198

Entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, is neither more nor less than pure love - love expelling sin and governing both the heart and life of a child of God. 199

. . . I advise you, frequently to read and meditate upon the 13th chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. There is the true picture of Christian perfection! Let us copy after it with all our might Indeed, what is it more or less than humble, gentle, patient love! 200

But in Wesley's thinking, this love meant specifically love for God. In his sermon on "The Circumcision of the Heart" (1733) he noted

¹⁹⁵ Wesley, Works, Vol. VII, p. 67 (Sermon XCII "On Redeeming the Time").

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., Vol. XI, p. 430 ("A Plain Account of Christian Perfection").

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 401.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 46 (Sermon XLIII "The Scripture Way of Salvation").

¹⁹⁹ Wesley, Letters, Vol. V, p. 223. (To Walter Churchey, February 21, 1771).

²⁰⁰ Ibid., Vol. VII, p. 120 (To Ann Loxdale, April 12, 1782).

that love is the essence of all the commandments:

In this is perfection, and glory, and happiness. The royal law of heaven and earth is this, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." 201

This love of God was both the foundation of man's happiness, and of his ability to change morally, and conform to holiness.²⁰² However, to say that Christian perfection meant loving God implied far more. The practical result included love for one's neighbour. Wesley realised that there was an inseparable connection between loving God and loving men. One could not serve or love God in a vacuum:

One of the principal rules of religion is, to lose no occasion of serving God. And, since he is invisible to our eyes, we are to serve him in our neighbour; which he receives as if done to himself in person, standing visibly before us. 203

The love of neighbour was "the necessary fruit of this love of God," and it included not only fellow believers, but "every soul which God hath made."²⁰⁴ Wesley consistently emphasised that the Christian's love and

²⁰¹Ibid., Vol. V, p. 207. This early sermon is in a real sense prototypic of Wesley's mature theology. He posits that the circumcision of the heart is comprised of humility, faith, hope, and love. His description of humility is akin to his later discussions of repentance, man's first step in the process of salvation. His concept of faith is not nearly so developed as his mature belief that it is the only condition of salvation, and yet is God's gift. His view of hope is similar to the later doctrine of assurance, and the resulting love (both of God and neighbour) is extremely close to his established thoughts on perfection.

²⁰²Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 71 (Sermon XLV "The New Birth").

²⁰³Ibid., Vol. XI, p. 440 ("Plain Account of Christian Perfection"). See also Vol. VI, p. 413.

²⁰⁴Ibid., Vol. V, p. 219 (Sermon XVIII "Marks of the New Birth").

service is due to "every man in the world."²⁰⁵

Again, Wesley was not content to simply refer to "love of neighbour," but he specified (biblically) what that entailed. In the words of Paul, it meant:

" . . . love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity . . . meekness, temperance." What a glorious constellation of graces is here! Now, suppose all these things to be knit together in one, to be united together in the soul of a believer, this is Christian perfection. 206

He felt that this love was nowhere better described than in I Corinthians, chapter thirteen,²⁰⁷ and it affected both the bodies and souls of men, in the concrete acts of feeding, clothing, visiting, instructing and guiding spiritually.²⁰⁸ The results of such loving actions would be no less miraculous than in the first century. Want would be ended by voluntary distribution, and the powerful example would remove the "stumbling-block" of Christianity; it would be a new day for evangelism.²⁰⁹

In addition, Wesley was clear about the fact that living in this manner, experiencing this quality of love was not something that man could independently do. It was the result of God's grace; it was God's gift:

. . . this love of human kind cannot spring but from the love of God. . . . there can be no instance of one whose

²⁰⁵ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 22 (Sermon II "The Almost Christian"). See also Vol. XI, p. 418 ("Plain Account of Christian Perfection"). Later on, p. 431 Wesley warned of "bigotry," encouraging his followers not to confine their love of beneficence to Methodists, or more particularly sanctified Methodists. See also Vol. V, p. 79, and Vol. VI, p. 413.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., Vol. VI, pp. 413-14 (Sermon LXXVI "On Perfection").

²⁰⁷ Ibid., Vol. XI, p. 530 ("Plain Account of Christian Perfection").

²⁰⁸ Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 51 (Sermon XLIII "The Scripture Way of Salvation").

²⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 284-5 (Sermon LXIII "The General Spread of the Gospel").

tender affection embraces every child of man . . .
 unless that affection flow from a grateful filial
 love to the common Father of all

This filial love . . . flows/s/ only from faith

. . . both this faith and love are wrought in us by the
 Spirit of God; nay . . . there cannot be in any man one
 good temper or desire, or so much as one good thought,
 unless it be produced by the almighty power of God, by
 the inspiration or influence of the Holy Ghost. 210

The same thought occurs in Wesley's sermon on I Corinthians, thirteen:

. . . such a love of our neighbour . . . can only spring
 from the love of God. And whence does this love of God
 flow? Only from that faith which is of the operation
 of God. 211

Bound together in Wesley's doctrine of grace is the reality that man
 is not only forgiven, but he is also given new abilities. Directives
 which were out of reach under law became attainable under grace. The
 higher ethic of human love and benevolence is possible: "'Thou shalt
 love thy neighbour as thyself,' is as express a promise as a

²¹⁰Ibid., Vol. VIII, p. 352 ("Advice to the People Called
 Methodists").

²¹¹Ibid., Vol. VII, p. 47 (Sermon XCI "On Charity"). In his
 "Minutes of Some Late Conversations," Wesley again stated that ". . .
 no true holiness can exist without that love of God for its foundation."
 (Vol. VIII, p. 290). See also Vol. VII, pp. 38 269. Again, in "The
 Scripture Way of Salvation," (Vol. VI, p. 45) he says: "We are inwardly
 renewed by the power of God. We feel 'the love of God shed abroad in
 our heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us;' producing love to
 all mankind, and more especially to the children of God." (italics mine).
 See also Vol. V, pp. 60, 86.

Wesley took issue with those he termed "the great triumvirate,"
 (Rousseau, Voltaire, and Hume) on this very point. While they advocated
 the singular love of fellow man, Wesley contended that separated from the
 love of God, this was "neither better nor worse than Atheism." He
 believed that God had joined the love of neighbour and of God, and from
 the love of God "springs real, disinterested benevolence to all mankind."
 (Works, Vol. VII, pp. 271-2, Sermon CXIV "The Ministerial Office").

command."²¹² To summarise, according to Wesley Christian perfection was simply living according to the two great commandments; loving God with all one's heart, and loving one's neighbour as one's self.

It is interesting to see how Wesley valued love in relation to other theological concepts. While he certainly followed the Protestant tradition of giving very high priority to faith (as mentioned previously, it was the only condition for both justification and sanctification), its importance lay not in itself, but in what it made possible - love. What was lost in the fall was the divine relationship of love. The entire plan of redemption was to restore that relationship, and faith was merely part of the process; it served "not as an end, but a means only."²¹³ It was

. . . the handmaid of love. As glorious and honourable as it is, it is not the end of the commandment. God hath given this honour to love alone: Love is the end of all the commandments of God. 214

Later in the same sermon, Wesley expressed his perspective on the role of faith more completely:

Faith, then, was originally designed of God to re-establish the law of love. Therefore, in speaking thus, we are not undervaluing it, or robbing it of its due praise; but, on the contrary, showing its real worth, exalting it in its just proportion, and giving it that very place which the wisdom of God assigned it from the beginning. It is the grand means of restoring that holy love wherein man was originally created. It follows, that although faith is of no value in itself . . . yet as it leads to that end, the establishing anew the law of love in our hearts; and as, in the present state of things, it is the only means under

²¹²Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 415 (Sermon LXXVI "On Perfection"). For Wesley's fuller comment that a command under the law becomes a promise under the gospel, see Vol. V, p. 313. This concept will be dealt with more fully in Chapter IX.

²¹³Wesley, Letters, Vol. II, p. 75. (To John Smith, June 25, 1746).

²¹⁴Wesley, Works, Vol. V, p. 462 (Sermon XXXVI "The Law Established Through Faith").

heaven for effecting it; it is on that account an unspeakable blessing to man, and of unspeakable value before God. 215

It is the primacy of love in Wesley's theology of Christian perfection that links it to the basic principles of the Bible, gives it broader appeal, and prevents it from becoming anachronistic. It is true that in his teaching of perfection Wesley varied with regard to the peripheral details of the doctrine, for example when it occurred, its tenure and how it is related to sin (and these have been the issues from which the various "holiness" dogmas have taken root and grown apart); but in regard to the core of the teaching, love, Wesley was consistent. Further, as he predominantly taught it, the applications are timeless.

Wesley's understanding of perfection is most accurately seen in terms of a relationship, rather than a state. Many "perfection" controversies are fostered by viewing sanctification as a state, or a static possession. Wesley, however, saw perfection in terms of love, and he described this love as dynamic (particularly as he related perfection to the love described in I Corinthians, chapter thirteen); it was a living relationship, not a state:

Does not talking, without proper caution, of a justified or sanctified state, tend to mislead men; almost naturally leading them to trust in what was done in one moment? Whereas we are every moment pleasing or displeasing God, according to our works; according to the whole of our present inward tempers and outward behaviour. 216

While it is true that at times Wesley described sanctification as an "individual possession," as Staples points out, he ". . . was fully aware that man's holiness was totally derivative from God, that man's perfection

²¹⁵Ibid., p. 464. See also Vol. VIII, p. 513, and Vol. XI, p. 416.

²¹⁶Ibid., Vol. VIII, p. 338 ("Minutes of Several Conversations"), *italics mine*.

in love was grounded in his relation to God."²¹⁷

It is in seeing perfection as a relationship that a number of difficulties are resolved. One of these is the persistent question of whether sanctification occurs instantaneously or gradually. While Wesley pondered this issue and at times leaned one way or the other (especially when pushed polemically), most frequently he asserted that sanctification is both instantaneous and gradual.²¹⁸ It is in the context of a relationship that the gradual and instantaneous can both be maintained, rather than seen as antithetical. A relationship has a moment of beginning, it can also have moments of great intensity, but following and surrounding such moments is the continual process of living and growing. In Wesley's thought, the faith which initiates sanctification is given in a moment, but the process it initiates, carries on gradually.²¹⁹ As he explains in his "Plain Account of Christian Perfection, "

²¹⁷ Staples, op. cit., p. 216. Staples goes on to explain the nature of love: "But love is not a state of being; it is a relation. This is true even with the Divine Being. The Johannine declaration that 'God is love' is set in the context of his relationship to man. Love is a term describing God in his relatedness, not in his absoluteness. Love, therefore, necessarily involves a relational situation."

In his very interesting study he examines Wesley's doctrine of perfection in light of Martin Buber's terms: "I/It" and "I/Thou." Staples feels that Wesley's view of perfection as "possession" fits the "I/It" model, but further posits that Wesley really transcends this view, and a more adequate understanding is in terms of a dialogical relation, similar to Buber's "I/Thou" model. See Staples, op. cit., pp. 146, 149ff.

²¹⁸ Staples suggests that from 1725 to 1738 Wesley emphasised exclusively the gradual aspect; from 1738 until 1758 he held to both an instantaneous and a gradual view, sometimes emphasising one, and sometimes the other; from the late seventeen-fifties on he posited a "working synthesis," involving "an instantaneous moment of entire sanctification as a definite point within the gradual process." (Staples, op. cit., pp. 94-5.)

²¹⁹ Wesley, Works, Vol. XI, pp. 382-3, 393, 423 ("Plain Account of Christian Perfection"). See also Vol. XII, p. 275.

sanctification:

. . . is constantly both preceded and followed by a gradual work.

An instantaneous change has been wrought in some believers: None can deny this.

Since that change, they enjoy perfect love; they feel this, and this alone; they "rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks." Now, this is all that I mean by perfection; therefore, these are witnesses of the perfection which I preach.

"But in some this change was not instantaneous." They did not perceive the instant when it was wrought. It is often difficult to perceive the instant when a man dies; yet there is an instant in which life ceases. And if ever sin ceases, there must be a last moment of its existence, and a first moment of our deliverance from it. 220

And regarding the fact that after such "instants" the ongoing process is absolutely necessary (a relationship rather than a possession),

Wesley affirms:

The holiest of men still need Christ, as their Prophet, as "the light of the world." For he does not give them light but from moment to moment: The instant he withdraws, all is darkness. They still need Christ as their King; for God does not give them a stock of holiness. But unless they receive a supply every moment, nothing but unholiness would remain. They still need Christ as their Priest, to make atonement for their holy things. Even perfect holiness is acceptable to God only through Jesus Christ. 221

²²⁰Ibid., p.442. Similar to his analogy of death, which may be approached gradually but happens in a point in time, Wesley also uses the analogy of birth, indicating that the work of sanctification occurs, but then must be followed by growing "gradually." (Vol. VI, p. 91, Sermon XLVI "The Wilderness State").

²²¹Ibid., p. 417. Lawrence Wood, op. cit., (pp. 117-18) also interprets Wesley's view as transcending a simple gradual or instantaneous choice: "Unfortunately, the concept of the perfection of the believer's righteousness as being subsequent to justification has often been interpreted strictly in accord with the modern concept of linear time. Consequently, the doctrine of perfection as a second work of grace has often been discredited, through the static notion that there are only two absolute crisis points in which righteousness is appropriated. To be sure, Wesley stressed the second work of sanctifying grace, but it would be a misunderstanding to think of 'two works of grace' as disjointed and absolute events. . . .the biblical concept of salvation history presupposed a view of time which was a synthesis of the 'circular view' and a 'linear view.' Hence, the biblical view of time is neither purely sequential, nor circular; rather, the biblical concept of the flow of time presupposes both the idea of crisis points and an ongoing process.

Since perfection was for Wesley integral with, and a continuation of the whole redemptive process, it is most reasonable to interpret his view as containing both instantaneous and gradual elements.²²² In fact, Wesley clearly asserted that the sanctified believer, although "perfect" in one sense, could still (and must) continue growing, not only temporally, but throughout eternity.²²³ He recognised no such thing as absolute perfection:

The highest perfection which man can attain, while the soul dwells in the body, does not exclude ignorance, and error, and a thousand other infirmities. Now, from wrong judgments, wrong words and actions will often necessarily flow: And, in some cases, wrong affections also may spring from the same source. ²²⁴

(Footnote 221 continued from page 303)

The past event in the flow of time is never merely past, but is constantly relived and updated in the present. The events in time constitute both crisis and process. Any view which eliminates the dynamics of this tension between process and crisis is inadequate. To speak of two works of grace in absolutist terms, or to speak of two works of grace in mere fluid terms is a misconception of Wesley's understanding."

²²²The reader is referred to some of the numerous passages where Wesley contended for both elements:
Wesley, Works, Vol. VI, pp. 5, 75, 91, 490-91, 509; Vol. VII, pp. 205, 212; Vol. VIII, p. 329; Vol. XI, pp. 382-3, 393, 402, 423, 442; Vol. XII, pp. 207, 275, 333-4, 416. It should be further pointed out that in the 1760s Wesley questioned the instantaneous nature of sanctification. See his letters to Charles in Works, Vol. XII, pp. 132 and 136, and Letters, Vol. IV, p. 187. See also Lindström op. cit., pp. 121ff.

²²³"Can those who are perfect grow in grace? Undoubtedly they can; and that not only while they are in the body, but to all eternity." (Works, Vol. XI, p. 426, "Plain Account of Christian Perfection"). On p. 442 of the same work Wesley states, that perfection is ". . .improvable. It is so far from lying in an indivisible point, from being incapable of increase, that one perfected in love may grow in grace far swifter than he did before." In his treatise on "Original Sin" he likewise asserted that "entire holiness does not exclude growth." (Works, Vol. IX, p. 310.)

²²⁴Wesley, Works, Vol. VI, p. 412 (Sermon LXXVI "On Perfection"). See also Vol. XI, p. 383.

Man could not even attain the perfection Adam enjoyed before the fall; he would continue to violate the "Adamic as well as the angelic law,"²²⁵ but under grace he was no longer judged by that absolute standard. He was under the "law of love," a standard in conjunction with his relationship with God, the relationship which made him a constant recipient of the benefits of the atonement.²²⁶

Sanctification seen as a relationship also sheds light on the question of "sinless perfection." Besides the fact that Wesley discouraged the use of the term,²²⁷ the idea of relationship makes it non-applicable. If perfection were a state that must be maintained for God's acceptance, sinlessness would be crucial. If however, it is a relationship of grace, whereby sin is dealt with and even removed, any sinlessness is a by-product, rather than a condition. In such a relationship intent becomes the crucial issue. Wesley was careful not to rule out the possibility of falling into sin.²²⁸ The issue of sin in relation to perfection emerged as another "holiness" controversy in the periods following Wesley. Peters points out that the problem lies in defining what Wesley meant by sin being "destroyed." If he meant "eradicated" as one group maintained, the implications are far different from if he meant "suppressed", as

²²⁵Ibid., p. 413. It is interesting to note that in another context Wesley stated that because of the fall and thus the atonement, man can in fact be more holy than he could have without the fall. Cf. Works, Vol. VI, pp. 232-3.

²²⁶Ibid.

²²⁷Ibid., Vol. XI, pp. 396, 418, 442, 446.

²²⁸Ibid., p. 426. In this passage Wesley says that formerly he believed a sanctified person could not fall, but "now we know the contrary." For Wesley's idea of "inward" and "outward" sin, related to the believer, see his sermons: "On Sin in Believers" (Works, Vol. V, pp. 144ff.) and "The Repentance of Believers" (pp. 156ff.)

others believed. But Peters suggests that in spite of various terms, Wesley believed sin was "driven out," thus incapacitated, but this did not preclude its return.²²⁹ Staples suggests that the entire question of sin related to perfection takes on a different colour when one is speaking of a "perfect relation" instead of a "perfect Christian." The debate changes markedly when sin is described as a "loss of relation by a temporary relapse."²³⁰ It is interesting to note Wesley's own caution and advice that in teaching the doctrine of perfection, the standard must neither be set too high, nor too low.²³¹

Cell points out that one of Wesley's contributions to theology was his redirecting the emphasis of contemporary religion from formal ceremony to living experience:

Before John Wesley the word "experience" does not occupy the conspicuous position in the preaching, teaching, writing of any master of doctrinal and practical Christianity. The reference to experience does occupy for the first time in the history of Christian thought the conspicuous position in the Wesleyan understanding of the Gospel. In fact the appeal to experience is so pervasive and powerful as to determine its historical individuality. It is a theology of experience. . . . No other teacher of the Christian church . . . ever laid upon experience so heavy a burden of responsibility for discerning and confirming the truth-values of the Christian faith. ²³²

This emphasis on the importance of personal involvement (an emotional/intellectual/spiritual interaction, i.e., experience) corresponds with

²²⁹Peters, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

²³⁰Staples, op. cit., p. 277. For an excellent discussion of Wesley's view of sin, see Staples, pp. 263-77.

²³¹Wesley, Works, Vol. XI, p. 451 ("An Answer to the Rev. Mr. Dodd"), Vol. XII, p. 131 (Letter to Charles, 1766), and p. 207 (Letter to Miss Furley, 1762).

²³²Cell, op. cit., p. 72-3. Cell goes on to say that the emphasis on experience in Wesley was consistent with the intellectual and scientific milieu of the time, especially as seen in David Hume and Immanuel Kant (pp. 82-3.)

Wesley's idea of the relational aspect of sanctification. It was not just a religious state, to be allowed to grow cold and to be later reduced to a theological term; it was a continuing relationship, an ongoing experience.²³³

Further, sanctification seen as a relationship excludes the possibility of gauging one's spiritual condition on a different scale from, or in isolation of one's interpersonal dealings. As stated above, Wesley believed that one's loving actions to the invisible God had to be directed to one's visible fellow human beings. Thus, a perfect relationship to God could not be separated from the believer's relationships to his fellow man. To a large extent they were synonymous. Specifically, Wesley equated holiness with doing good to others, and asserted that the result of this kind of holiness is happiness:

The more we deal our bread to the hungry, and cover the naked with garments, - the more we relieve the stranger and visit them that are sick or in prison, - the more kind offices we do to those that groan under the various evils of human life, - the more comfort we receive even in the present world, the greater the recompence we have in our own bosom.

To sum up what has been said under this head: As the more holy we are upon earth the more happy we must be

²³³ In regard to the question of whether Wesley claimed to have attained the perfection he preached, there are passages in his writings which seem to indicate that he did and did not. Peters (op. cit., Appendix A, pp. 201-15) discusses the passages at length and concludes that while Wesley "never bore unequivocal testimony" to attaining it, he experienced "in some measure" this perfect love. (Peters, op. cit., p. 214) On the other hand, Starkey (op. cit., p. 60, n. 107) says that Wesley "never claims to have attained the goal," and in support, mistakenly quotes a letter to that effect. In fact, the letter is not Wesley's as Starkey assumes, but from Thomas Walsh, one of Wesley's preachers who died in 1759. See R. Newton Flew, The Idea of Perfection In Christian Theology (London, 1934), pp. 322-3. See Letters VII, p. 300 (to Newton), where Wesley indicates clearly that he "loves God."

. . . as the more good we do to others, the more of present reward redounds into our bosom 234

Here one's ongoing social relationships are seen as inseparable from his sanctification. In the "Plain Account of Christian Perfection" he stated that those who "love God with all their heart," feel a "constant . . . desire for the happiness of every man" ²³⁵ This desire finds expression in the actions and attitudes of Corinthians thirteen. ²³⁶

Even the idea of sanctification destroying sin contains a social dimension. Wesley contended that sin destroyed peace within and between men. By contrast, anything that destroys sin, restores that peace and insofar as it establishes peace between men must be considered to have major social significance. ²³⁷ On the contrary, when men fail to do loving acts for each other, even their "works of piety" become sinful. ²³⁸ A more thorough study of the social implications of "Christian perfection" will occur in the following chapter.

Indubitably the doctrine of Christian Perfection contains several implications for the question of slavery regarding both the nature of the slave, and the nature of the Christian. The first is seen in the teaching that sanctification, as a part of the whole process of redemption, was for every man. It crossed all lines of division: race, sex, age

²³⁴ Wesley, Works, Vol. VI, p. 237 (Sermon LIX "God's Love to Fallen Man").

²³⁵ Ibid., Vol. XI, p. 418.

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 430.

²³⁷ Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 155 (Sermon LII "The Reformation of Manners").

²³⁸ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 265 (Sermon XXII "Sermon on the Mount, II") ". . . want of charity will make all those works /of piety/ an abomination to the Lord."

and status. The result of experiencing that sanctification meant the believer was in process of having the image of God restored in his life. Could it be conceivable to enslave and degrade a man who has the potential of bearing the very image of God? Rather than enslave, the desire would be to teach and nurture every one with that potential, i.e., every human being in the hope of allowing that perfection to be born.

It is in the doctrine of perfection that Wesley posits an extremely high view of man. To be sure, the fall (a product of man's choice) resulted in man's depravity, the lowest possible view of man; but God's grace opened the possibility of men's transcending that depth and achieving (more precisely, receiving through God's gift of faith) the heights of human potential. Such a high view of man is totally incompatible with any system that allows a man (even forces him) to become the equivalent of serving beasts, unequal to the rest of mankind, finding his value only in being of physical use to his "superiors." A theology that fosters the ideal of man as capable of the image of God cannot co-exist with an institution that reduces man to the image of a beast.

The second implication is seen in Wesley's prescription of how the Christian lives in anticipation of sanctification. As indicated above (p. 289) as soon as a believer repents (the second repentance) he begins to do works of repentance, which include both works of piety, and works of mercy. The latter include assisting all men both physically and spiritually. Holding others in the bonds of slavery would be adverse to such works of mercy. As discussed earlier in this study, physical, intellectual and spiritual deprivation were inherent in eighteenth century slavery. Could one take part in such a system and still claim to do works of mercy? On the contrary, to take seriously the works of

mercy would involve the believer in ministering to the needs of slaves, or even working for the long range goal of ending the system that perpetuated those needs.

For those believers who experienced some measure of the perfect love by which Wesley described sanctification, it would be impossible to justify the system or practices of slavery while claiming perfect love for one's neighbour. The fact that perfection cannot be experienced apart from relationships, (it cannot be compartmentalised and isolated from human interactions), meant that wherever the neighbour was afflicted, where man's happiness was being destroyed, the Christian living in perfect love would be drawn to the needs of his fellows. Relational love could not turn a blind eye toward the gross injustices of the system of slavery. To be misled into believing that slavery was not harmful by exposure to cases of congenial slavery would be short lived, particularly in light of the writings of men such as those in this study who insisted that the abuses of slavery were inherent in the system. Perfect love for one's neighbour could simply not tolerate a system which perpetuated that neighbour's misery. Admittedly, those Christians who believed they experienced such love were not always clear on what action to take. But that is a matter of strategy, not principle. In principle, the kind of love which Wesley advocated as possible and necessary in sanctification was antithetical to slavery.

V

THE THEME OF STEWARDSHIP

Although it cannot technically be considered one of Wesley's major doctrines, there is a theme that frequently recurs throughout his writings, and it bears directly on the question of slavery. It is the theme of stewardship. According to Wesley, all that man has, whether material or spiritual, is his only by the grace of God. Man is never the "owner" or possessor, rather he is the trustee. He stated explicitly: "You are not the proprietor of anything - no, not one shilling in the world, you are only a steward of what another entrusts you with, to be laid out not according to your will, but His."²³⁹ This principle applies to the measure of free will man experiences, his spiritual experiences such as justification, regeneration and sanctification, his "natural rights," and his material wealth. The last two issues will here be discussed.

In regard to wealth, Wesley is well known for his advice to "gain all you can, save all you can, and give all you can."²⁴⁰ It is in fact, this teaching to which many attribute the social elevation of the first generation of Methodists. By following Wesley's dictum, the poor reversed the habits of idleness and foolish spending; they began to become prosperous and charitable. What he taught involved 1) being as industrious as possible, 2) saving all one could, not in the sense of hoarding, but by conserving and living as simply as possible, and finally putting the results of those principles to good use in 3) giving all they could to others. Because of their conservatism, and their retaining no more than what was required for "necessities," there would

²³⁹ Wesley, Letters, Vol. III, p. 122.

²⁴⁰ Wesley, Works, Vol. VI, p. 124ff. (Sermon L "The Use of Money").

be an excess to share with others. Unquestionably, this teaching was essentially social, in the sense of social benevolence. For Wesley, the entire matter of wealth was a simple matter of social concern, governed by the love of neighbour and demonstrated by physically helping that neighbour. Gaining and saving all one could became evil when not connected to the end goal of giving. This is when riches were sinful.²⁴¹

Wesley's teaching on money was inseparable from his overall view of the church. The connection is especially vivid in his sermon "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity." He contended that for Christianity to be effective, it must first be present in a place. Secondly, the members must have discipline. But, he went on to explain that even when these conditions are met, often there is still failure. The reason, he concluded is that Christians were not giving all they could to help the needs of their fellow man. Christianity was not working because of a lack of social concern; Christians were not clothing and feeding the destitute.²⁴² Wesley's message was clear: the world is influenced by personal social concern and action. When Christians fail at this, the church fails.

Many of the practices Wesley preached against as inappropriate for a Christian, were wrong, he explained, not in themselves but because they prevented or reduced the demonstration of love to one's neighbour. For example, to spend money on "costly apparel" was wrong because

. . . the more you lay out on your own apparel,
the less you have left to clothe the naked, to
feed the hungry, to lodge the stranger, to relieve
those that are sick and in prison, and to lessen

²⁴¹Ibid., Vol. VII, p. 216 (Sermon CVIII "On Riches"), pp. 9-11, 14, (Sermon LXXXVII "The Danger of Riches").

²⁴²Ibid., pp. 282-90, especially, 286-7. (Sermon CXVI "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity")

the numberless afflictions to which we are exposed
in this vale of tears. 243

The same principle is apparent in his preaching against "worldly
folly," and "public diversions" (horse racing).²⁴⁴

Wealth out of the context of stewardship, seen merely as a possession, Wesley considered to be destructive both to the "owner" and to society. The man of riches grew harmfully self-willed:

. . . as not only his domestic servants and immediate dependants are governed implicitly by his will, finding their account therein; but also most of his neighbours and acquaintances study to oblige him in all things: So his will being continually indulged, will of course be continually strengthened; till at length he will be ill able to submit to the will either of God or men. 245

And society was harmed because the hoarding of wealth produced great economic inequities which were increased and perpetuated by continued hoarding.²⁴⁶

However, in the context of stewardship, Wesley saw wealth as one of the greatest blessings of life:

God has entrusted us . . . with a portion of worldly goods . . . he has committed to our charge that precious talent which contains all the rest, - money: Indeed it is unspeakably precious, if we are wise and faithful stewards

²⁴³Ibid., p. 20 (Sermon LXXXVIII "On Dress"). See also pp. 21 and 25. Wesley made it clear that clothing which engenders pride, or provokes lust is also wrong, pp. 17 and 19.

²⁴⁴In the sermon "On Worldly Folly" (Works, Vol. VII, pp.305ff.) Wesley discusses the judgment of the man who grew rich, and built larger barns to house his wealth (Luke xii. 20). Wesley's condemnation is that his foolishness consisted of using his wealth for his ease rather than in helping the poor. The sermon is a strong social comment on what the man could have done to help the needy around him. See also Sermon CXL "On Public Diversions," Vol. VII, pp. 500ff.

²⁴⁵Wesley, Works, Vol. VII, p. 220 (Sermon CVIII "On Riches"). He further decried the idleness and sloth produced by "possessed" wealth (p. 413).

²⁴⁶Warner, op. cit., p. 209.

of it; if we employ every part of it for such purposes
as our blessed Lord has commanded us to do. 247

And there was no doubt about how that "excellent gift of God" should
be used:

In the hands of his children, it is food for the
hungry, drink for the thirsty, raiment for the naked:
It gives to the traveller and the stranger where to
lay his head. By it we may supply the place of an
husband to the widow, and of a father to the fatherless.
We may be a defence for the oppressed, a means of health
to the sick, of ease to them that are in pain; it may
be as eyes to the blind, as feet to the lame; yea, a
lifter up from the gates of death! 248

Unmistakably, all material possessions were seen as a trust from God,
and were to be shared with an open hand. As Warner indicates, although
Wesley's view of economics fostered industriousness, especially among
the poor, it was only for the purpose of sharing the resulting wealth.²⁴⁹

The implications of Wesley's view of monetary stewardship on the
question of slavery are direct and clear. His advice to "gain all you
can" carries with it the provision that this is to be done without
doing any harm to one's self, or one's neighbour (his "substance,"
"body," or "soul").²⁵⁰ In no way could the system of slavery be said
to meet this condition. Even under the best conditions where the slave's
body or soul might not be harmed, clearly his "substance" was hurt, as

²⁴⁷ Wesley, Works, Vol. VI, p. 139 (Sermon LI "The Good Steward").

²⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 126 (Sermon L "The Use of Money"); "You will have no
reward in heaven for what you lay up; you will, for what you lay out."
(Vol. VII, p. 37 Sermon LXXXIX "The More Excellent Way"); See also Vol.
VI, pp. 134-5, 146-7, 332, 334; Vol. V, pp. 374-5, and Vol. VII, p. 360.

²⁴⁹ Warner, op. cit., pp. 161-4. Warner continues that while the
prevalent view of the eighteenth century attributed poverty to supposed
insufficiency of material goods, idleness of the poor due to their de-
pravity, and Providence, Wesley believed that poverty was the responsibility
of the entire community, not just the poor; while there were sufficient
material goods, inequitable consumption by a few produced poverty of the
rest, and this was immoral as all belonged to God; lack of employment was
often the result of injustice, and all classes were guilty of laziness.
See Warner, op. cit., pp. 155-64.

²⁵⁰ Wesley, Works, Vol. VI, pp. 126-9 (Sermon L "The Use of Money").

the very system negated any claim he had to the fruits of his labour. Wesley's advice to live by necessities, avoiding extravagances ("save all you can") was exactly the opposite of the slavery enterprise.²⁵¹ Too often the slaves would not even be granted the necessities in order that the slave owner could continue his life of luxury. The third dictum ("give all you can") imposed a lifestyle perceiving oneself as God's property, consequently supplying the necessities progressively to oneself, one's immediate family, the "household of faith," and finally, all men. The last need must be met before one could justly even consider an extravagance for himself. This rule is nothing other than a system of common sharing.²⁵² It was the exact opposite of slavery which produced the ever increasing imbalance of wealth, by systematically robbing the poor in order to oversupply the rich.²⁵³ Warner indicates that the first Methodists followed the formula in all three points, and prospered, but as time went on they began to put aside the third point. Wesley was adamant in his condemnation and even attributed the decreased Methodist success at Bristol to "love of money" and "love of ease." By 1789 the Conference pronounced its indictment on the wealth and lack of giving among Methodists.²⁵⁴

²⁵¹Ibid., pp. 131-2.

²⁵²Ibid., pp. 133-5; also pp. 146-7. Warner agrees that Wesley's concept of industry was for the goal of improving the total community. Wealth only created more opportunity for more industry, and thus greater sharing (Warner, op. cit., pp. 161-4).

²⁵³See also Wesley's sermon on "Dives and Lazarus," (Works, Vol. VII, p. 250), and his "Sermon on the Mount, VIII" (Works, Vol. V, pp. 374-5).

²⁵⁴Warner, op. cit., pp. 192-3, 197. See also Works, Vol. VII, pp. 84, 248.

Of course it should be understood that Wesley's idea of stewardship in regard to money also applies to property. "No human authority was competent to alienate the divine title" to property, and this included not only land, but men's abilities and bodies.²⁵⁵ With no "right" to ownership of property, no man could lay claim to "owning" the body of another human being as slavery maintained. Wesley believed that a man did not even "own" his own body, but held it in trust from God.²⁵⁶

Previously (Chapter VII) it was pointed out that Wesley was not a consistent proponent of natural rights, but used the argument selectively, especially when speaking against slavery. It is in the context of stewardship that his view of natural rights can be clarified. He believed that what man may conceive of as "rights," were in fact received from God through grace, and were dependent on God's will:

God had sole power and authority over life and death . . . liberty was basically a function of prevenient grace, happiness was a result of sanctification, and property was available from God for man's use but not his exploitation. 257

Thus, man could not speak of absolute rights. He could only speak of rights of stewardship, and these must be exercised in regard to the will of God, i.e., serving God and one's fellow man. For Wesley, no man could claim a "right" that enabled him to work in opposition to such

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 208.

²⁵⁶ Wesley, Works, Vol. VI, (Sermon LI "The Good Steward") pp. 136-49, particularly, pp. 137-9. At this point Wesley differs from John Locke. While Locke maintained that man had a "right" to property, Wesley saw man only as the "trustee." Thus Wesley defended the use of property as a civil liberty, not as an absolute.

²⁵⁷ Madron, "The Political Thought of John Wesley," p. 78.

loving service, as slavery undeniably did.

Stewardship must be seen as a major teaching of Wesley where there was any consideration of personal rights or possessions. It could be argued that if stewards, men could conceivably maintain a stewardship "responsibility" over those less capable, i.e., the Africans. Thus, congenial slavery could be viewed as a blessing rather than a bane. It would help the Christian to fulfil his obligation. But this argument cannot be sustained with any awareness of Wesley's perspective on stewardship. Men need not serve as stewards of those "less capable," because Wesley did not believe the negroes were less capable, except as they had been made so by slavery. Secondly, as a steward, every man was directly accountable to God. The system of slavery made man accountable to his fellow man, thus nullifying one of Wesley's basic theological tenets.

Wesley's view of stewardship stood in opposition to slavery particularly from the perspective of the nature of the Christian. He had no absolute rights. All that came to him (material and non-material) was his by trust. Acquisition and use were strictly governed by the needs of his fellows. There could be no compatibility between such views and the foundational assumptions of the institution of slavery.

In conclusion to this chapter it should be clarified that the distinctive doctrines of Wesley contain only "implications" against slavery. While implications do lie within the doctrines, they were not usually explicitly applied to slavery by Wesley. They were most often left undeveloped, as his approach was frequently to explain the broad, general truths, and leave the specific applications to his hearers. However, it is the view of the writer that these implications, rooted in the doctrines, form the basis of Wesley's antislavery stand, and that they give a sound Christian rationale and impetus to developing anti-slavery thought of the late eighteenth century.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSIONS:

THE RELATIONSHIP OF WESLEY'S THEOLOGY TO HIS TOTAL SOCIAL ETHIC,
AND HIS SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE ANTISLAVERY CAUSE

I

MAJOR SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS IN WESLEY'S THEOLOGY

To see the antislavery implications in Wesley's distinctive theological doctrines is only one aspect of the larger dimension. These same doctrines carry implications for a much more inclusive social ethic, as indeed do his major doctrines which may not necessarily be distinctively Wesleyan but held in common with other eighteenth century evangelicals. Wesley's view of creation, while not given the attention he gives the fall, certainly lays the foundation for his social ethic. Man was created in the image of God. He was created perfectly, in perfect relation to God, and thus capable of perfect relationships with his fellows. Particularly in his Genesis 1:27 sermon can be seen the beauty of man at creation. He experienced loving dominion over the created world.¹ Because man was God's highest creation, he was due respect and liberty; he was not to be debased by others to a position lower than his created glory. Thus Wesley protested the miserable existence of slaves, asserting that the Creator did not intend his "noblest creatures" to be so treated.² He protested anything or any system that so debased man. All ethical questions would be considered by Wesley in light of man being the epitome of God's creation.

¹Wesley, Sermon on Genesis 1:27, pp. 3-5. See also Wesley, Works, Vol. VI, pp. 215ff. "God's Approbation of His Works," and pp. 241ff., "The General Deliverance."

²Wesley, Works, Vol. XI, p. 68 ("Thoughts Upon Slavery").

Like his view of creation, Wesley's doctrine of the fall is not particularly distinctive. As noted in the preceding chapter, he felt that the doctrine of man's depravity was crucial to the rest of theology as it established the need for the entire area of soteriology. The implications of Wesley's view of depravity on slavery apply equally well to the broader question of social ethics. The universality of depravity meant that all men were equally depraved, thus no man could be trusted with unrestricted power over others, nor could men be left to govern themselves. Men's ethical judgments (impaired by depravity) must be strengthened, even directed by that which is not impaired by human sin, God's law. Wesley's view of depravity showed the depths of evil to which man could go if unrestrained. Further, it showed the utter necessity of God's grace if society is to be positive and beneficial. Depraved man, apart from God's grace can demonstrate neither justice nor mercy, two essential elements of men living in harmony.

Wesley's Christology also speaks to his social ethic. While he emphasised the divinity of Christ far more than his humanity, Wesley did firmly believe in the perfect humanness of Christ. As John Deschner points out, Wesley considered his view to be thoroughly Anglican, and derived from the Thirty-nine Articles:

The crucial passage from the Anglican second article is taken over verbatim into the second of his own Twenty-five Articles: "two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided; whereof is one Christ, very God and very Man." 3

Following classical doctrine, Wesley held that Christ had a being before

³Deschner, Wesley's Christology, p. 15. This is perhaps the most thorough study of Wesley's doctrine of Christ.

he took on human nature, but his condescension consisted of uniting himself with human nature when he became a man.⁴ The humanity of Christ is stated clearly in Wesley's sermon "On Working Out Our Own Salvation:" Christ

"emptied himself" of that divine fulness, veiled his fulness from the eyes of men and angels; "taking," and by that very act emptying himself, "the form of a servant; being in the likeness of man," a real man, like other men . . . a common man, without any peculiar beauty or excellency 5

As man Christ experienced the limitations of men, but he also demonstrated the holiness of God in human flesh.

The relevance of Wesley's Christology to his social ethic is that by the full humanity of Christ, the brotherhood of all men is established. This fact is assumed throughout Wesley's writings. Consistently when he refers to the Christian's brother or neighbour he means every human being, not just the "household of faith." It is Christ's humanity that makes all men his brothers and thus brothers to each other.⁶ In the social context, instead of the matter of faith separating men into believers and non-believers, the focal point is the incarnation which confirms the commonality and equality of all men as brothers. Further, it is the human life of Christ that both gives definition to holiness and shows the extent of holiness possible within the human situation. Deschner's thesis

⁴Ibid., p. 28, citing Wesley's Notes, John 8:16, 1:14, and Hebrews 9:5, and Wesley's "Compend of Natural Philosophy", v, 215.

⁵Wesley, Works, Vol. VI, p. 507. See also Vol. XII, p. 476.

⁶There are times when Wesley advises that acts of mercy should begin within the "household of faith," but they do not exclusively remain there; all men are to benefit from the loving acts of the Christian. At other times Wesley makes no distinction regarding the recipients of Christian beneficence.

is that Wesley's Christology is the "presupposition" of his theology, not just an "appendix";⁷ thus the human ministry of Jesus is inseparable from the social obligations Wesley placed on his followers.

The doctrine of the atonement contained important social overtones for Wesley, overtones of which he was well aware. His belief that the atonement was unlimited meant very simply that all men were potentially sons of God, and for that reason must be treated as such. While the incarnation established the universal brotherhood of all men with God as the Father of all, the atonement added a second dimension, all human brothers were potentially spiritual brothers, with God as the common Giver of new life. Wesley took issue with those who held to a "limited atonement," feeling that such a view too easily separated men into two groups, and fostered discriminatory treatment of one's fellows if they were not "the elect."⁸

Within Wesley's view of the atonement was his doctrine of prevenient grace, as reviewed in Chapter VIII. This doctrine is pregnant with social ramifications. The fact that this grace is universal again reinforces the equality of all men. Likewise it gives to all men first the ability to discern good from evil (conscience), and secondly, a limited ability to do (non-salvific) good. Because of prevenient grace, the world is a different place than it would be if simply left in its depraved state. There is the possibility of social relationships existing on a higher level than would be feasible if men had no consciences or ability to do

⁷ Deschner, op. cit., p. 38.

⁸ Wesley made this point very clear in his sermon on "Free Grace," Works, Vol. VII, pp. 378-9. See above, Chapter VIII, pp. 266-8, 252-3.

any good, if men continued in a state of depravity untouched by grace. The evil that men do they do with awareness. By the same token, it is reasonable to appeal to men to change their lives, their relationships, because they are not completely fated in their situations but have a measure of freedom beyond the determinism of their depraved nature if unaided by grace. Wesley's concepts of creation, the fall, Christology and atonement definitely affect his view of man's relationships. Within his theology is an equality of evil, grace, freedom and responsibility.⁹ And the question of social ethics can be approached from a completely different perspective if these equalities can be assumed, rather than if they cannot.

Unquestionably, the doctrine which has the greatest potential for social application is Wesley's doctrine of Christian Perfection. He taught that the experience was both "inward" and "outward." In other words, it contained both the pietistic elements of meditation, prayer, scripture reading and the sacraments, and the more "activist" elements of service to others. The sincerity of the former, Wesley felt, could be seen in the depth and consistency of the latter. Very simply, within Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection can be seen his clearest description of his total social ethic, an ethic based on love. This love was inherently social, and although the generations following Wesley succeeded in separating the idea of the love of God from that of the love of neighbour, Wesley continually asserted that the two were inseparable and that the love of God could only be seen in the love of neighbour. Further, while his later followers succeeded in perpetuating a "doctrine," Wesley was concerned more with a style of living that reflected the

⁹ Madron concurs at least on the equality of evil, grace, and freedom. "The Political Thought of John Wesley," p. 83.

earthly life of Jesus and the total commitment to serving people that the first century church experienced. Consistently he taught his followers to "be more zealous for works of mercy, than even for works of piety."¹⁰

Whenever . . . one interferes with the other, works of mercy are to be preferred. Even reading, hearing, prayer, are to be omitted, or to be postponed, "at charity's almighty call;" when we are called to relieve the distress of our neighbour, whether in body or soul.¹¹

As indicated above, for Wesley, Christian Perfection was a dynamic, on-going relationship between God and man, and therefore between man and his fellows. Wesley opposed withdrawal (as the mystics proposed) from the world, asserting that sanctification was to be experienced within a social milieu.¹²

Wesley's most systematic treatment of the problem of social ethics occurred in his thirteen discourses on the Sermon on the Mount. Within this series can be seen the various strands of Wesley's theology, particularly his view of Christology, the atonement and perfection (true religion) but with a distinctly social application. In fact, his overall interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount was consistently in social terms. In his first discourse he described "righteousness" as "the love of God . . . and the love of all mankind for his sake."¹³ In the same sermon he defined "they that mourn" as not only those in a state of

¹⁰ Wesley, Works, Vol. VII, p. 65 (Sermon XCII "On Zeal").

¹¹ Ibid., p. 61.

¹² For an excellent study of Wesley's doctrine of Perfection, focusing particularly on the aspects of love and relationship, see Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, A Theology of Love, The Dynamic of Wesleyanism (Kansas City, Missouri, 1972) especially pp. 21-52, 73, 100-101.

¹³ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 256. This definition is repeated in discourse IX, Vol. V, p. 387.

conviction, but those mourning "for the sins and miseries of mankind."¹⁴

The essentiality of social involvement was established in the second discourse when he warned

that the performing our duty to God will not excuse us from our duty to our neighbour: that works of piety, as they are called, will be so far from commending us to God, if we are wanting in charity, that, on the contrary, that want of charity will make all those works an abomination to the Lord. 15

The trend was continued in the succeeding sermons. The "merciful" were they "who love their neighbours as themselves,"¹⁶ a "peacemaker" was one who "doeth good to all men," and that "good" is expressed in the terms of Matthew, chapter twenty-five, (predominantly physical aid to the needy).¹⁷ In explaining the passage "take no thought for the morrow," Wesley stated that "the most fatal way of 'taking thought for the morrow'" was to "make the care of future things a pretence for neglecting present duty."¹⁸ Clearly he believed that the present duty involved service to mankind, as he had just dealt with the concept of God's Kingdom, which is comprised of those renewed in the image of God, i.e., those who love God and all men.¹⁹ Thus, the "Kingdom" was seen not as a state, so much as an army of Christians doing the kind of ministry that Jesus did while on earth. Wesley saw this as inseparable from the petition

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 258-60.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 265.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 270.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 284-5.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 390.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 387-90.

"Thy will be done in earth," which implied deep social involvement with the needs of mankind. He interpreted the petition in an "active" more than a "passive" way, believing that while in some circumstances it may mean resignation to God's will, more frequently it meant doing what God desired.²⁰

In the tenth discourse Wesley spoke of "genuine morality" in terms of the golden rule. He applied it in the context of man's needs:

. . . our superfluities give way to our neighbour's conveniences . . . our conveniences, to our neighbour's necessities; our necessities, to his extremities. 21

Even the passage "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life" was interpreted by Wesley to include social actions as well as inward tempers; the way, he admonished is to "Abstain from all appearance of evil, and Do all possible good to all men" ²²

In the concluding discourse Wesley reinforced the interaction of faith and works. Using the parable of the man who built his house upon the sand, he stated that unless one begins his religion on the inward principle of personal faith, all of his good works are no more than a foundation of sand.²³ However, to claim faith but not be "zealous of good works" was equally erroneous. "Good works" were again related to the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew: feeding and clothing the destitute, visiting the sick, and relieving those in prison:

²⁰Ibid., pp. 336-7.

²¹Ibid., p. 404. Warner indicates that the early Methodists adhered so closely to Wesley's admonitions on sharing that they were sometimes criticised by outsiders for giving "with an apparent recklessness which seemed outrageous in the face of their own apparent needs." Clearly they were better off than before their conversions and were gratefully willing to give. (Warner, op. cit., p. 215)

²²Wesley, Works, Vol. V, p. 413.

²³Ibid., pp. 424-29.

But "what does it profit, if a man say he hath faith, and have not works?" Can "that faith save him?" O no! That faith which hath not works, which doth not produce both inward and outward holiness, which does not stamp the whole image of God on the heart, and purify us as he is pure; that faith which does not produce the whole of religion described in the foregoing chapters, is not the faith of the gospel, not the Christian faith, not the faith which leads to glory If thou layest stress on this, thou are lost for ever: Thou still buildest thy house upon the sand. 24

The message is clear. First comes inward religion of the heart:

faith. Then, enabled by that faith comes the outward expression: the works of love to mankind. To follow this order and interaction of faith and works is the only way to build upon a foundation of rock.²⁵

Throughout the series on the Sermon on the Mount it is apparent that Wesley believed the virtues which most truly characterise Christianity are to be found in social relationships.²⁶

Even in some sermons that deal primarily with inner religion, those of a more pietistic bent, an obvious social dimension is still present. In a sermon dealing exclusively with the subject of fasting, Wesley concluded by describing the necessary conditions for a fast to be acceptable to the Lord: the observer must "add alms thereto; works of mercy, after our power, both to the bodies and souls of men."²⁷ He then quoted from Isaiah 58:6:

Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry 28

²⁴Ibid., pp. 430-1.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 431-3.

²⁶Madron ("The Political Thought of John Wesley" p. 56) concurs in this judgment.

²⁷Wesley, Works, Vol. V, p. 360.

²⁸Ibid.

In a sermon on self-denial Wesley affirmed the necessity of denying oneself in order to be "fully Christ's disciple." He associated works of charity with self denial, explaining that when such works are not done it is because a person is not willing to deny himself. Thus Wesley inextricably tied social concern and action to self-denial, and that to Christian growth.²⁹

Although at times Wesley gave his followers specific instructions regarding works of mercy (usually related to the poor), it appears that he was more concerned to help the believer establish a basic attitude, a "Christian" perspective from which to view all of life's responsibilities and relationships.³⁰ This basic attitude could be summed up as the ethic of love, and comprises the whole of Wesley's social ethic; he often termed it "true religion."³¹ It could also be called "total" religion, as it involved total commitment, even to the extent of relinquishing the right of ownership. As seen above (Chapter VIII) Wesley's concept of stewardship meant that a Christian was a distributor of God's bounty, all that came into his hands was to be disbursed. He was the man for

²⁹Ibid., Vol. VI, pp. 104-5, and 112.

³⁰Mercer, op. cit., p. 74.

³¹For some of the sermon passages where the social dimension is obvious in what Wesley calls "true religion," the reader is referred to the following: Works, Vol. V, pp. 141, 219, 256, 265, 296-7, 299, 334, 375ff., 381, 465, 498. Vol. VI, pp. 112, 498-9. Vol. VII, pp. 263, 269, 353.

Among Wesley's sermons that have a particularly strong appeal to social action the reader is referred to: Sermon XLVIII "Self-Denial," (Works, Vol. VI, p. 103), Sermon L, "The Use of Money" (p. 124), Sermon LI "The Good Steward" (p. 136), Sermon LII "Before the Society for the Reformation of Manners" (p. 149), Sermon LXXXVII "The Danger of Riches" (Vol. VII, p. 1, especially p. 14), Sermon CXVI "Cause of the Inefficacy of Christianity" (p. 281), and Sermon CXXVI "On the Danger of Increasing Riches" (p. 355, especially pp. 360-62).

others. If followed to the degree Wesley taught and practiced, this system would result in a decentralised socialism; decentralised because every man acted from intrinsic motivation (his love for God and man) rather than from an organisational directive. And Wesley did not think this was requiring too much of true Christians. It seemed to him to be exactly what the first century church modelled,³² and it had the potential of providing eyes to the blind, hands and feet to the lame, and care to the fatherless and widow.³³ The conscientious application of such an ethic would have had far reaching impact on the injustices of the industrial revolution as well as on all the social institutions of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

It must also be conclusively pointed out that Wesley's emphasis was not primarily "other worldly." While the eternal was kept in mind, and was the ultimate goal, the present was of great importance as the preparation and proving ground. As Sweetland accurately points out, Wesley took issue with Rousseau's opinion that Christians were too concerned with future things to be socially responsible in the present world.³⁴ Wesley desired to produce a society of good Christians who were also ideal citizens. He felt that the genuine Christian

. . . was not concerned solely with heavenly things, as Rousseau had written, but was concerned solely with showing his love for God and man, and he could not regard with indifference the success or failure of his earthly responsibilities. He could not, if he claimed to be a follower of John Wesley, regard with indifference the performance of his duty to God, the king, or his fellow man, since to do so would be a denial of his moral obligations. 35

³²Wesley, Works, Vol. V, p. 377.

³³Ibid., p. 375. See also Vol. VI, p. 126.

³⁴Sweetland, op. cit., p. 165, citing J. J. Rousseau, Social Contract.

³⁵Ibid.

For Wesley the idea of the other world served not as a soporific for the miseries of this world but as an incentive to responsibly change the negative situations of men, to be involved in relieving their lot. To be sure, Wesley held that temporal relief was secondary to spiritual conversion, but it was indispensable as a means to that end.³⁶

Closely related is the fact that Wesley saw the Christian ethic he preached as attainable by man through grace. On numerous occasions he spoke of the difference in justification and the new birth as the former changing one's relationship to God and the latter actually changing the person, restoring the image of God in man.³⁷ For this reason Wesley could see no excuse for antinomianism. His was an "ethics of realization, not just aspiration."³⁸ The law, especially where it had social relevance, took on a whole new dimension because of the work of Christ. Those duties which were commands under the law (and impossible to fulfil solely by human effort), became promises under the gospel:

. . . there is no contrariety at all between the law and the gospel . . . there is no need for the law to pass away, in order to the establishing the gospel. Indeed neither of them supersedes the other, but they agree perfectly well together. Yea, the very same words, considered in different respects, are parts both of the law and of the gospel: If they are considered as commandments, they are parts of the law; if as promises, of the gospel. Thus, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," when considered as a commandment, is a branch of the law; when regarded as a promise, is an essential part of the gospel; - the gospel being no other than the commands of the law, proposed by way of promise On the one

³⁶ Wesley, Works, Vol. VII, p. 124 (Sermon XCVIII "On Visiting the Sick").

³⁷ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 224 (Sermon XIX "The Great Privilege of Those That Are Born of God"), also p. 56. Cf. above, pp. 291-2. 295.

³⁸ Cannon, op. cit., p. 225.

hand, the law continually makes way for, and points us to, the gospel; on the other, the gospel continually leads us to a more exact fulfilling of the law. The law, for instance, requires us to love God, to love our neighbour We feel that we are not sufficient for these things, yea, that "with man this is impossible:" But we see a promise of God, to give us that love We lay hold of this gospel, of these glad tidings; it is done unto us according to our faith; and "the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us," through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 39

In this teaching Wesley asserted the possibility of a radical psychological transformation in man. What was once unreachable for man is now within his grasp; what he once perceived as unfulfillable laws, he now sees as promises to be claimed and enjoyed in his life. Both man's ability and perception have been drastically altered.

It is singularly important that Wesley used this concept in reference to holiness which he defined largely in social terms. He lodged social concern in the command to love one's neighbour as oneself, and then asserted this to be possible not by negating the law, but by allowing the gospel to turn the law into a promise. Thus, a realised ethic is possible because by grace, and in faith, the Christian shall be enabled to love his neighbour as himself. Wesley saw this love as only possible from a relationship with God: "Believe in him and thy faith will work by love. Thou wilt love the Lord thy God because he hath loved thee: thou wilt love thy neighbour as thyself" ⁴⁰ To deny the ability to experience the promise (keep the law) was to deny the efficaciousness of the gospel. According to Wesley, to disregard or discount the law (as opposed to being enabled by the gospel to fulfil it) was tantamount to giving Christ the kiss of Judas. ⁴¹ He believed that

³⁹ Wesley, Works, Vol. V, pp. 313-4 ("Sermon on the Mount, Discourse V") (*italics mine*).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 404.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

men could be changed, and as they were, the needs of society would be met. A wave of a new and Christian morality would sweep the country as men adopted God's values. Far from being "other worldly" in the sense of withdrawal, Wesley's idea of Christianity saw true religion as the initiator of man's new social awareness, and the energiser of his ability to live on a higher social plane.⁴²

⁴²The findings of the present study generally concur with the position taken by Schilling on the social implications of Wesley's theology. One difference however, is that the present writer has looked to the broader spectrum of Wesley's theology, while Schilling refers to the social ethics implicit in Wesley's view of salvation. Interestingly, the findings are very similar, but this might well be expected as all of Wesley's theology related to his central theme of salvation. Included here are Schilling's summarised statements of Wesley's social implications:

1. "God has acted to redeem all men; we are therefore called upon to love all men and seek their highest spiritual and material welfare. No human being . . . stands outside the circle of Christian responsibility, because no human being is excluded from the redemptive concern of God."

2. "Salvation is realized in proportion as the faith which inaugurates it is expressed in love." "Growth in holiness necessarily involves good works"

3. "Salvation is throughout ethical - though not only ethical."

4. "Salvation is not only future, but relates to the life of men here and now."

5. "Salvation relates to the whole life of man, which rightly seen is a stewardship."

6. "Salvation is realized within a community, and in this sense is itself social."

(S. Paul Schilling, Methodism and Society in Theological Perspective, New York, 1960, pp. 56-61)

II

WESLEY'S PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL CHANGE

John Wesley was very concerned with the problems and miseries of humanity. Further, he believed that the message of Christianity was the solution to those problems, and the nature of Christianity demanded that its adherents actively apply that solution. He took issue with the mystics whom he said taught Christians that their growth would be enhanced by withdrawal from society, and they should not be concerned with outward works but give themselves to contemplation.⁴³ Wesley countered:

Directly opposite to this is the Gospel of Christ. Solitary religion is not to be found there. "Holy solitaires" is a phrase no more consistent with the Gospel than holy adulterers. The Gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness, but social holiness. Faith working by love is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection. This commandment have we from Christ, that he who loves God, love his brother also; and that we manifest our love by doing good to all men, especially to them that are of the household of faith. And, in truth, whosoever loveth his brethren not in word only, but as Christ loved him, cannot but be zealous of good works. He feels in his soul a burning, restless desire of spending and being spent for them. My Father, will he say, worketh hitherto, and I work: and, at all possible opportunities, he is, like his Master, going about doing good. 44

⁴³Ibid., Vol. XIV, pp. 320-21 (Wesley's preface to "The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley"). This was also published separately, arranged by G. Osborn, (London, 1868). It should be noted that Wesley advocated not a free or haphazard involvement with the world, but controlled and purposeful contact especially with those who might be influenced for Christ. See his sermon "In What Sense We Are To Leave the World," Vol. VI, p. 464ff.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 321-2. In discourse IV of his "Sermon on the Mount," Wesley also said: ". . . Christianity is essentially a social religion; and that to turn it into a solitary one is to destroy it," (Works, Vol. V, p. 296) and a "solitary Christian" is "little less than a contradiction in terms." (p. 298.)

The Christian must be involved in society, the society of the church for his own growth and fellowship, and the society of the world for his ministry. It was from this twofold involvement that the world would be benefitted: as Christians increased in strength and in numbers their ministry (good works) would have greater impact on those in need. The church would change society.

Before we examine how Christianity would affect the problems of society, a prior consideration must be addressed, and this is Wesley's idea about the nature of social ills. Wesley firmly believed that the problems of society stemmed totally from the individual. As Warner points out, he was convinced that ". . . social maladjustments were due, not to any necessary defect in the organised community, but to human will. It was men who failed, not the arrangements of the social structure" ⁴⁵ The normal state of unregenerate man meant that he was selfish, and thus at odds with the best good for the overall community. Wesley opposed the views of Rousseau and Voltaire (regarding their optimism about society) thinking they did not realise (or admit) the degenerate state man was actually in. ⁴⁶ The problem was sin which ". . . directly tends both to destroy our peace with God . . . and to set every man's sword against his neighbour!" ⁴⁷ Man's disharmony with man was simply a by-product of his broken relationship with God. Thus, society's problem could be traced to sin, and this was an individual matter.

⁴⁵ Warner, op. cit., p. 138.

⁴⁶ Cooper, op. cit., p. 120.

⁴⁷ Wesley, Works, Vol. VI, p. 155 (Sermon LII "The Reformation of Manners").

It followed logically for Wesley that if sin was the root cause of society's problem, and sin was initially a problem within individuals, the solutions to the problems of society also rested in individuals. As sin was dealt with and removed, the problems would be solved. That is why the gospel was the only cure: ". . . whatever prevents or removes sin does, in the same degree, promote peace, both peace in our own soul, peace with God, and peace with one another."⁴⁸ As individuals were renewed, society would reflect the change. For support of his thesis, Wesley turned to the early church to demonstrate that as individuals were "restored to the image of God," social concern became "written on their hearts." They shared all things in common, and distributed to those in need without being so commanded.⁴⁹ He was confident that the intervening centuries had not altered the societal benefit:

The natural, necessary consequence of this will be the same as it was in the beginning of the Christian Church: . . . they will have all things common. Neither will there be any among them that want. ⁵⁰

While in the above passages Wesley was speaking of a social equality and benefit within the church, throughout his writings he clearly indicated that works of mercy are to be done to all in need, not only those within the church. The result of individual conversion is that selfishness is replaced by love and love is the cure to social discord. Wesley related it to the ills of the world:

This love is the great medicine of life; the never-failing remedy for all the evils of a disordered world; for all the miseries and vices of men. Wherever this is, there are virtue and happiness going hand in hand; there is humbleness

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 253, 255-5 (Sermon LXI "The Mystery of Iniquity").

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 284 (Sermon LXIII "The General Spread of the Gospel").

of mind, gentleness, long-suffering, the whole image of God; and, at the same time, a "peace that passeth all understanding," with "joy unspeakable and full of glory." This religion of love, and joy, and peace, has its seat in the inmost soul; but is ever showing itself by its fruits, continually springing up, not only in all innocence, (for love worketh no ill to his neighbour,) but, likewise, in every kind of beneficence, - spreading virtue and happiness to all around it. 51

Because the problems of society were the result of sin in individuals, the solutions would be found in individuals, as they were enabled to experience love through faith. Paul Schilling accurately sums up Wesley's thought:

"Social holiness" meant for him not the transformation of social structures to accord with the divine will, but holiness experienced by persons who found mutual strengthening in Christian fellowship, and who practiced their faith in all their relations with their fellow men. The notion of social salvation in the sense of institutional reform would have been alien to his mind For the most part he did not challenge the economic and social institutions of his day, but with all his energy he sought the regeneration and transformation of the human beings affected by them. In practice, therefore, Wesley's ethic was chiefly individual, as was the scriptural holiness which he sought to "spread through the land." 52

What then was Wesley's philosophy of social change? How specifically did the individual Christian effect the improvement of men's condition? In his fourth discourse on the "Sermon on the Mount" Wesley relates his most concise description of how the Christian modifies the order of society. Using the biblical image that Christians are the "salt of the earth," he explains:

It is your very nature to season whatever is round about you. It is the nature of the divine savour which is in you, to spread to whatsoever you touch; to diffuse itself, on every side, to all those among whom you are. This is

⁵¹Ibid., Vol. VII, p. 424 (Sermon CXXXII "At The Foundation of City-Road Chapel"). The same passage is used by Wesley in his "Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion," Vol. VIII, pp. 3-4.

⁵²S. Paul Schilling, Methodism and Society in Theological Perspective, p. 61.

the great reason why the providence of God has so mingled you together with other men, that whatever grace you have received of God may through you be communicated to others; that every holy temper and word and work of yours may have an influence on them also. By this means a check will, in some measure, be given to the corruption which is in the world; and a small part, at least, saved from the general infection, and rendered holy and pure before God. 53

It is obvious that Wesley is advocating the effectiveness of infiltration, rather than legislation. He goes on to assert that not only do Christians "season" society, but "they cannot possibly fail to do, so long as true religion remains in their own hearts."⁵⁴ Continuing to use the symbol, he points out the utter worthlessness of salt which has lost its savour. The message is unmistakeable. Christian faith that does not penetrate society is worthless. It may be objected that Wesley's analogy of infiltration applies to evangelism, not social action. On the contrary, the entire sermon deals with authentic Christianity, indeed the opening sentence speaks of "holiness" and the renewed "image of God," and throughout Wesley's works, these concepts are consistently used in a context much broader than evangelism. They are used with reference to the great commandments of loving God and neighbour.⁵⁵ Certainly evangelism was part of Wesley's goal, but responding to the total needs of men was an

⁵³ Wesley, Works, Vol. V, p. 299. (italics mine)

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 300.

⁵⁵ Wesley's perspective on the wholeness of the Christian message is reflected in his letter to Miss Bishop: ". . . I find more profit in sermons on either good tempers, or good works, than in what are vulgarly called Gospel sermons. That term has now become a mere cant word: I wish none of our society would use it. It has no determinate meaning. Let but a pert, self-sufficient animal, that has neither sense nor grace, bawl out something about Christ, or his blood, or justification by faith, and his hearers cry out, 'What a fine Gospel sermon!' Surely the Methodists have not so learned Christ!" (Wesley, Works, Vol. XIII, p. 36 /October 18, 1778/).

even more integral part. Wesley taught loving social acts both as one aspect of evangelism, and as the expected level of interaction among Christians. It is plain that Wesley's idea of infiltration was for the total improvement of society, on every level, physical, social, intellectual and spiritual. When Christians took the loving life-style seriously, Wesley was convinced that the Kingdom of God would "silently increase . . . and spread from heart to heart, from house to house, from town to town, from one kingdom to another."⁵⁶ Undoubtedly, Wesley's vision was that sufficient numbers would be influenced so that the social order would undergo a radical change to the same extent that individuals did. Frank Whaling feels that Wesley's own work constituted a kind of "social leaven," and thus contributed to England's not succumbing to revolution. He suggests that Wesley's approach was "one of involvement and concern for all aspects of /people's/ lives," in contrast to a more sociological approach.⁵⁷ Indeed, Wesley intended that his own ministry should function as seasoning and preserving salt in a stale and decaying world.

Wesley's belief that social improvement would occur through individuals more effectively than through direct political change would have encountered little or no criticism from his followers. Most of them did not have the education, experience or even the desire to stimulate Wesley's political thinking or push him to more liberal (even radical) social theories. It would take time, trial and error, and

⁵⁶ Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 284 (Sermon LXIII "The General Spread of the Gospel").

⁵⁷ Frank Whaling, ed., John and Charles Wesley, Selected Writings and Hymns, (London, 1981), p. 57. Professor Whaling points out that Wesley lived a hundred years before the sociological work of Durkheim, a relevant reminder when examining Wesley's views of society.

education for such men to become politically sensitive.⁵⁸ Even more significant, Wesley saw evidence of the successful working of his philosophy. Without doubt one of the social institutions of eighteenth century England that most needed reform was the prison system. From his frequent visits, Wesley could attest to this:

Of all the seats of woe on this side /of/ hell, few, I suppose, exceed or even equal Newgate /in London/. If any region of horror could exceed it a few years ago, Newgate in Bristol did; so great was the filth, the stench, the misery, and wickedness, which shocked all who had a spark of humanity left. 59

It appears that the gaoler, Abel Dagge, had been converted by Whitefield in 1737 and over the following twenty years had completely transformed the prison. After a visit, Wesley was amazed at the change and made special note of the differences: "Every part of it" was "as clean and sweet as a gentleman's house," there was "no fighting or brawling," grievances were heard and settled by the keeper, drunkenness and prostitution were not tolerated, and their attendant bribery was ended, tools and materials were provided and a system of credit established so inmates who were craftsmen could work, medicine was made available to the prisoners without charge, religious services were conducted and a Bible was placed for the prisoners' common use.⁶⁰ According to Wesley, "the prison now has a new face: Nothing offends either the eye or ear; and the whole has the appearance of a quiet, serious family."⁶¹ For Wesley, this

⁵⁸ Warner, op. cit., p. 267.

⁵⁹ Wesley, Works, Vol. III, p. 33 (Journal, January 2, 1761, citing his letter to the London Chronicle).

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 33-4. See also Eric McCoy North, Early Methodist Philanthropy, (New York, 1914), pp. 58-9. (North's work was originally a Ph.D. thesis for Columbia University.)

⁶¹ Ibid.

accomplishment of a Christian prison-keeper was dramatic proof that the way to change society was to change individuals.⁶²

Further evidence supporting Wesley's theory of social change came from Kingswood where he felt a Christian society was beginning to be achieved. The colliers there had been well known for their indifference to God and their hostility to man. As Wesley said, they were "so ignorant of the things of God, that they seemed but one remove from the beasts that perish" (Halevy concurred in this judgment of miners in general).⁶³ But after the ministries of Whitefield and Wesley, an undeniable change had occurred:

Kingswood does not now, as a year ago, resound with cursing and blasphemy. It is no more filled with drunkenness and uncleanness, and the idle diversions that naturally lead thereto. It is no longer full of wars and fightings, or clamour and bitterness, of wrath and envyings. Peace and love are there. Great numbers of the people are mild, gentle, and easy to be intreated . . . hardly is their "voice heard in the streets" . . . unless when they are at their usual evening diversion, singing praise unto God their Saviour. 64

On a larger scale than a single prison, or town, Wesley had seen first hand the influence his followers had had on national public opinion in regard to the reputation of the "Methodists." From being considered

⁶²Experiences such as this must have contributed to Wesley's appreciation of John Howard, the prison reformer. They met in 1787 and Howard later commented:"I was encouraged by him to go on vigorously with my own designs. I saw in him how much a single man might achieve by zeal and perseverance . . . and I determined I would pursue my work with more alacrity than ever." (Quoted by Luke Tyerman, The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., 3 vols., (London, 1890), Vol. III, p. 495.

⁶³Wesley, Works, Vol. I, p. 251 (Journal, November 27 1739); Elie Halevy A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, 6 vols., Vol. I, England in 1815, trans. E. I. Watkins and D. A. Barker, 2nd ed., (London, 1949), p. 262.

⁶⁴Ibid., pp.251-2.

religious outcasts, enthusiasts and even Jacobites, within a short span of years they grew to be respected as a positive religious group, and Wesley himself moved from being the target of mob violence to a position of respect and even some veneration.

In light of the reformation of the Bristol prison, the transformation of the Kingswood colliers, and the change in public attitude toward Methodism, little wonder that Wesley felt individual Christians could effect the ending of slavery and the slave trade. He reasoned that "the public at large," even the "English Nation in general" would not accomplish the goal. Parliament was so busy that they were "not likely to attend to this." His target therefore was "those who are more immediately concerned . . . captains, merchants, or planters,"⁶⁵ and most directly, those he considered "the spring that puts all the rest in motion," the slave owners.⁶⁶ Addressing the common citizens, not the lawmakers, Wesley realised that the entire system would end if they simply accepted the truth of justice and refused to buy or own other men. In that case the arduous process of legislative change would be unnecessary, even superfluous.

It should be pointed out that while Wesley felt the individual was the key to social change, the most effective and lasting way to achieve social improvement, he was not opposed to other tactics. He encouraged individuals to band together in order to have greater impact against social evils. His strongest statement of support of such action occurs in his sermon to the Society for the Reformation of Manners, 1763, in which he praised their past successes, encouraged their continued efforts and advised regarding their membership selection and

⁶⁵ Ibid., Vol. XI, pp. 75-6 ("Thoughts Upon Slavery").

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 78.

motives.⁶⁷ While he normally believed that social justice was to be maintained by the legal authorities, on at least a couple of occasions Wesley made no disparaging remarks when groups of people took the situation into their own hands to ensure justice. On one occasion a shipload of corn was loaded for more profitable export in the presence of starving local inhabitants. The mob intervened, unloading the corn and selling it to those in need at the fair market price (1758).⁶⁸ At another time Wesley was unable to reach his appointed place of preaching at Truro because the town was blocked by a "huge multitude of tinners, who⁷ being nearly starved, were come to . . . demand an increase in their wages, without which they could not live."⁶⁹ The reader of Wesley's journal senses sympathy for the cause, not disapprobation at the method of the labourers. Without comment, Wesley found a new preaching site.

Regarding slavery, while Wesley initially felt the individual owner was the key to the problem, one wonders if the passing of time tempered his optimism about individual action becoming collective. Thirteen years after writing his tract against slavery, he wrote the Abolition Committee:

⁶⁷ Ibid., Vol. VI, pp. 149-67. It must be remembered that Wesley's concept of sin was predominantly sins of individuals, thus in this sermon he speaks of such problems as sabbath breaking, alcohol abuse and prostitution. In this sermon Wesley makes it clear that magistrates are ministers of God and as such restrain the evil of the world. In so doing, they also play a role in influencing men toward conversion.

⁶⁸ Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 446, (Journal, May 27, 1758).

⁶⁹ Ibid., Vol. IX, p. 468, (Journal, August 18, 1789).

My friends in America are of the same mind /about slavery/. They have already emancipated several hundred of the poor negroes, and are setting more at liberty every day, as fast as they can do it with any tolerable convenience. This is making a little stand against this shocking abomination; but Mr. Clarkson's design strikes at the root of it. 70

The next year the Arminian Magazine of which Wesley was editor, published a letter requesting petitions against the slave trade to be sent to Parliament.⁷¹ The effort to boycott slave-produced articles was spread by the network of Methodist preachers and supported by the Arminian Magazine.⁷²

It would appear that Wesley's early idea that the best way to change society was through the individual was somewhat naïve, or at least optimistic. No doubt, he overestimated the commitment and seriousness with which his followers would apply the principle of love to all of life's relationships. This was certainly true of the second generation of Methodists who would not have faced the opposition their predecessors did, nor realised how revolutionary were Wesley's teachings in their original setting. And yet, it is an oversimplification of Wesley's thought to say as Niebuhr does that "the hope of a thorough-going social reconstruction was almost entirely absent."⁷³ As far as the formal and intentional restructuring of society was concerned, this may be true. But Wesley saw the dynamics of human interaction to be the

⁷⁰ Wesley, Letters, Vol. VIII, pp. 276-7 (August 18, 1787).

⁷¹ The Arminian Magazine, Vol. XI, 1788, pp. 263-4.

⁷² Warner, op. cit., p. 244; The Arminian Magazine, Vol. XIII, 1790, p. 502.

⁷³ H. Richard Niebuhr, The Social Sources of Denominationalism, (New York, 1929), p. 66.

core of social structure, and for these dynamics he proposed specific restructuring along the lines of mutual respect, trust and care - in his word, love. Wesley could not be described as being unconcerned with social structures; he could be called naïve and idealistic about how they functioned.

Again, Niebuhr's statement that Wesley "envisaged sin as individual vice and laxity, not as greed, oppression, or social maladjustment"⁷⁴ is not completely accurate. Wesley clearly taught that individual sin did involve greed, oppression and selfishness, any attitude or behaviour that did not conform to the values of I Corinthians, thirteen, or the command to love one's neighbour as oneself. For Wesley this individual sin became social when experienced by the masses of society. If he did not speak out against the social relationship problems brought on by the industrial revolution, it was because he still saw them in terms of individual wrongs. If Wesley overestimated the ability of individuals to change situations, he underestimated the strength of social structures to perpetuate themselves and the injustices brought upon the people. He did not seem to realise that a very small minority could wield sufficient power to keep structures alive, and the masses would participate often innocently, because they were unaware of the relationship of their actions to the overall structure.

Still, Wesley's emphasis on the individual was needed in the eighteenth century. His focusing on the sensuality and intemperance was initially

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 67. Madron also takes issue with Niebuhr's interpretation saying that "the evidence seems to indicate that Wesley was concerned with the justice inherent in social problems because an unjust circumstance constituted a denial of the love relationship and it was the love relation which made justice possible." ("The Political Thought of John Wesley," p. 61).

necessary for the poverty-stricken of England because they perceived their only escape to be in alcohol and sexual indulgence.⁷⁵ Such escape however, was a continuing threat to their human dignity and Wesley confronted this behaviour. As they heeded his message a new sense of self-respect began developing, and this was essential for the kind of social witness needed in later years. While the radicals proved to be closer to workable solutions for eighteenth century problems, Wesley's emphasis on the moral strength of the individual proved to be vital in preparing citizens for their responsibilities.⁷⁶ Although Wesley did not relate his social ethic to the structures of society, but dealt in broader, more general teachings, the men he influenced carried further the implications of his message, and applied them more specifically. It is interesting to note that while the second generation of lay Methodists may have lost some of the cutting edge of Wesley's revolutionary teaching, and therefore would not have brought about the social transformation by infiltration that he envisioned, the second generation of Methodist leaders were more effective in carrying his message to the nerve centers of policy formation, where they would have far-reaching sociological effects. As Schilling states: "The nineteenth century witnessed a powerful thrust toward legislative reform and institutional change. Specifically, historians and social scientists have noted strong influences from the evangelical revival in the antislavery movement . . . social and economic reforms . . . the temperance movement . . . the organization of societies for the prevention of cruelty to children and animals; and kindred developments."⁷⁷

⁷⁵Schilling, op. cit., pp. 62-3.

⁷⁶Sweetland, op. cit., p. 173.

⁷⁷Schilling, op. cit., p. 64.

But as seen in Wesley's letter to the abolition Committee (above p. 342), there is evidence to suggest that in his last years he was beginning to modify his strategy of social change. It appears that he was growing increasingly aware that the reformation of individuals would not automatically reform social structures. Without direct social reform the reformation of individuals would be frustrated, perhaps even futile.

Madron perceptively observes a relevant historical contrast. Eighteenth century thinking (and Wesley fits this generalisation) focused on the individual, as the starting point for altering society. Collectivism has been the trend of the twentieth century and it is posed that only as society is changed will change occur within the individual.⁷⁸ In fact it could be argued that neither position is correct, but a synthesis is needed. Indeed it may be speculated that near the end of his life Wesley was approaching such a synthesis. While he never lost sight of the importance of the individual and his integral role in society, his last letter to Wilberforce indicates that he had come to grips with the power of structures. He encouraged Wilberforce to carry on as "Athanasius against the world" because of the strength of his opposition.⁷⁹ With Wilberforce fully representing the contingent of antislavery thought that acted through legislative change, it is clear that Wesley supported such action. It can be decisively stated that at no time did Wesley oppose legislative action as a means of social change.

⁷⁸Madron, "The Political Thought of John Wesley," p. 336.

⁷⁹Wesley, Works, Vol. XIII, p. 153 (February 26, 1791).

II

THE OUTGROWTH OF WESLEY'S SOCIAL ETHIC: HIS PHILANTHROPY

Wesley's social ethic and philosophy of social change were not merely theory for him. He took very seriously and applied in his own life the principles he taught. His extensive philanthropy and his establishing of programmes to relieve social distress speak eloquently to this fact. Although the influence of his theological implications far outlived the influence of his actual philanthropic deeds, it is still important to note the latter because they reflect the spirit of the man, and his consistency. Further, they reveal his personal theology in its primary setting and context. He lived in accordance with his judgment that the "grand pest of Christianity" was "a faith without works."⁸⁰ A humorous illustration of his practicing the stewardship he preached in order to meet the needs of the poor can be seen in his response to the excise office. Wesley, by this time a man of renown and it was supposed of proportionate wealth, was challenged on the small amount of taxable goods he had declared, specifically, silver. He responded to the officer:

Sir, - I have two silver teaspoons at London, and two at Bristol. This is all the plate which I have at present; and I shall not buy any more while so many round me want bread. I am, sir, Your most humble servant. 81

Conservative living for the sake of philanthropy had begun during his student days. Wesley describes one of the experiences that evoked his early resolve to live simply in order to give liberally:

Many years ago, when I was at Oxford, in a cold winter's day, a young maid . . . called upon me. I said, "You seem half-starved. Have you nothing to cover you but that thin linen gown?" She said, "Sir, this is all I have!" I put my

⁸⁰ Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 259. (Sermon LXI "The Mystery of Iniquity")

⁸¹ Wesley, Letters, Vol. VI, p. 230 (September, 1776), (Italics Wesley's.)

hand in my pocket; but found I had scarce any money left, having just paid away what I had. It immediately struck me, "Will thy Master say, 'Well done, good and faithful steward?' Thou hast adorned thy walls with the money which might have screened this poor creature from the cold! O justice! O mercy! Are not these pictures the blood of this poor maid?" 82

It was a resolve that he kept faithfully for the rest of his life.

He records that he and his fellow members of the Holy Club established the base annual amount they needed to live on. Everything in excess of that amount was given away, regardless of the income. His own circumstances at the beginning of this experiment required twenty-eight pounds for living expenses. Out of his thirty pound income, he gave away two pounds.

The next year receiving sixty pounds, he still lived on twenty-eight, and gave away two-and-thirty. The third year he received ninety pounds, and gave away sixty-two. The fourth year he received a hundred and twenty pounds. Still he lived as before on twenty-eight; and gave to the poor ninety-two. 83

In later years when he could have been very affluent by the sale of his books and other sources of income, he received only sixty pounds a year from the London Society (some of which he no doubt gave away). Henry Moore, Wesley's biographer, estimated that over a fifty year period, Wesley gave away more than thirty thousand pounds,⁸⁴ an incredible amount for an era in which a man could live on between thirty and sixty pounds per year. Unquestionably he gained, saved and gave

⁸² Wesley, Works, Vol. VII, p. 21 (Sermon LXXXVIII "On Dress").

⁸³ Ibid., p. 36 (Sermon LXXXIX "The More Excellent Way"). In this illustration Wesley is referring to himself although he does not specifically identify himself. It must be understood that such a consistent spending pattern was only possible in a period that did not know modern inflation.

⁸⁴ North, op. cit., p. 122. For interesting details of Wesley's giving, and charity he was asked to administer for other benefactors, see p. 122, n.3.

all he could.⁸⁵

More than simply giving money, Wesley was directly involved with the needy, both in personal service and in organising his followers to meet specific needs. From his early days in the Holy Club he regularly visited the prisons and several local poor families. This involved spiritual encouragement, the giving of a Bible if the needy were literate, giving money for the children's clothing and for their having an opportunity to learn to read, and providing needed medicine. The motive was the biblical injunction to care for the hungry, naked, sick and imprisoned and the realisation that "'inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'"⁸⁶

In 1741 Wesley inaugurated a kind of welfare system whereby members of his United Society would contribute spare clothing and a penny per week "to be distributed among those that wanted most."⁸⁷ Warner indicates that through this poor relief scheme some of the societies provided from six to seven hundred pounds annually.⁸⁸ In the same year Wesley organised a system for unemployed women whereby they would be paid the "common price" for their knitting, but given additional funds "according as they need."⁸⁹ The programme had been preceded by a pilot scheme whereby twelve of the poorest women had been employed in carding and spinning for months of the previous winter. Wesley's personal interest was

⁸⁵ A letter to his sister reveals Wesley's interesting attitude toward money: ". . . money never stays with me: it would burn me if it did. I throw it out of my hands as soon as possible lest it should find a way into my heart." Wesley, Letters, Vol. V, pp. 108-9, (October 6, 1768).

⁸⁶ Wesley, Works, Vol. I, pp. 9-11 (Journal).

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 309. This criterion for designating the recipients of aid stands in contrast to the later Victorian attitude of distinguishing between the "deserving" and "undeserving poor."

⁸⁸ Warner, op. cit., p. 219.

⁸⁹ Wesley, Works, Vol. I, p. 309.

demonstrated by his frequent visits.⁹⁰ Although the plan succeeded, its duration is unknown.

In 1746 Wesley saw that many were unable to carry on their business because of a temporary lack of capital. Except from the pawn-broker, money was not available. Contributions were solicited and a loan fund was established. Within the first year some two hundred and fifty persons were aided. By 1772 the borrowing limit was increased, and the fund continued to be a successful venture for many years.⁹¹

Following the dramatic conversions of many colliers in Kingswood (as mentioned above) a school was begun for their children. It appears that Whitefield initiated the idea, but Wesley was left in charge, and continued to give guidance. The school was successful, continuing into the nineteenth century.⁹² Over the years a number of other ventures were begun, including a school at Bristol, a school and "poorhouse" at the Foundery in London, and an "Orphan House" in Newcastle. The Newcastle institution in fact was used more to help the aged and poor widows than orphans.⁹³

From Wesley's great concern for public health grew a number of loving enterprises to meet community needs. One such was a detailed and thoroughly organised system of visiting the sick. Wesley had become aware of the magnitude of the problem of illness among the poor, and

⁹⁰North, op. cit., pp. 67-8.

⁹¹Wesley, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 267 ("A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists").

⁹²North, op. cit., pp. 76-81. The school for colliers' children is to be distinguished from the school for Methodist ministers' children which Wesley began in 1748 (p. 82).

⁹³Wesley, Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 265-6; North, op. cit., pp. 83-88.

that many died needlessly for want of attention, or lack of money for food or medicine. He divided the town into sections, appointed and instructed teams to make systematic visits. Every sick person was to be visited three times a week, encouraged spiritually and given material assistance if needed. Accounts were to be forwarded to the Stewards of the society, and later this was turned over to class Leaders.⁹⁴ The programme met with great success particularly with the many instances of less serious illness where the help of visitors could avert increased illness from negligence. In fact, it has been suggested that the programme contained the seeds of later social case work.⁹⁵

For greater illness among the poor however, Wesley saw that his programme of visitation was not sufficient. He attempted to enable more people to get into the hospitals, but was disappointed that they were not adequately helped. As a result he decided to open the first Methodist medical dispensary:

For six or seven and twenty years, I had made anatomy and physic the diversion of my leisure hours; though I never properly studied them, unless for a few months when I was going to America, where I imagined I might be of some service to those who had no regular Physician among them. I applied to it again. I took into my assistance an Apothecary, and an experienced Surgeon; resolving, at the same time, not to go out of my depth, but to leave all difficult and complicated cases to such Physicians as the patients should choose.

I gave notice of this to the society; telling them, that all who were ill of chronical distempers (for I did not care to venture upon acute) might, if they pleased, come to me at such a time, and I would give them the best advice I could, and the best medicines I had. 96

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 263.

⁹⁵ William C. Dowling, "Wesley and Social Care," in Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, Vol. XXXVI, June, 1968, p. 131.

⁹⁶ Wesley, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 264. David Thompson says this was the first free medical dispensary in London (John Wesley as a Social Reformer, p. 16).

Wesley was pleased with the response of the people:

In five months, medicines were occasionally given to above five hundred persons. Several of these I never saw before; nor I did not regard whether they were of the society or not. 97

Likewise he was pleased with the medical success of the venture. In the first six months, some six hundred people were treated:

More than three hundred of these came twice or thrice, and we saw no more of them. About twenty of those who had constantly attended, did not seem to be either better or worse. Above two hundred were sensibly better; and fifty-one thoroughly cured. 98

No doubt, much of the improvement was due to the strict regimen and more moderate living which Wesley prescribed. North indicates that the dispensary continued until it became too much of a financial burden sometime before 1754.⁹⁹

Wesley's concern for public health led him to move in yet another direction. Eager to make the successful remedies of the London dispensary more far reaching and widely available, in 1747 he published his medical book: Primitive Physick; or an Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases. There is little question of its popularity; it reached twenty-three editions within Wesley's lifetime, and thirty-two by 1828.¹⁰⁰ By present day standards it obviously appears extreme and ineffective; but by the standards of the day it was sensible and

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 264-5. He indicates that the cost of the medicine given away during this period was almost forty pounds.

⁹⁸ Ibid., Vol. II, p. 59 (Journal, June 6, 1747).

⁹⁹ North, op. cit., p. 42. North also states that the early success of the London dispensary persuaded Wesley to establish one in Bristol.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 43.

practical.¹⁰¹

Much more could be said about Wesley's philanthropy and personal involvement with the needs of others, but suffice it here to say that his life truly reflected the value system he preached. He declared that he had parted with the Moravians because of their lax attitude in regard to good works, especially toward non-members,¹⁰² and in later years he assured that a prime qualification for Methodist membership included service to men's bodily as well as spiritual needs.¹⁰³ He called the quietist teaching of not doing good "'unless our heart be free to it'" simply "that enthusiastic doctrine of devils."¹⁰⁴ The style of Wesley's philanthropy also reflects that his thinking went beyond the surface needs of men; his approach was not patronising, but ". . . the training of a whole class of society to realize its power to help its own weaker members"¹⁰⁵ Thus it would have more lasting results than what

¹⁰¹An interesting, and typical anecdote is related by Stanley Ayling (John Wesley, London, 1979, p. 168n.): "When in 1776 William Hawes, a physician . . . accused Wesley in Lloyd's Evening Post of being a dangerous quack, Wesley jauntily replied in the same journal that since Dr. Hawe's attack on his book there had been 'a greater demand for it than ever'. He hoped therefore for the favour of 'a few farther remarks.'" In fact, on occasion Wesley's ideas proved to be better founded than some of those of eighteenth century medicine, for example he opposed the then common practice of blood letting. He was an advocate of moderate diet, regular sleep and rigorous exercise. It is interesting to note that in Wesley's spreading such ideas through his book, his clinic and his system of visitation he predates the community preventive emphasis of the late nineteenth century.

¹⁰²Tyerman, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 337.

¹⁰³Warner, op. cit., p. 212.

¹⁰⁴Wesley, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 271. ("General Rules of the United Societies").

¹⁰⁵North, op. cit., p. 115.

is typically understood as "charity." Unquestionably Wesley's social ethic was a direct result of his theology. Otherwise, since he did consider himself an evangelist, his ministry would have been limited to what may be thought the "spiritual" aspect of evangelism. On the contrary, ". . . wherever the spirit of the revival spread, there also were spread the accompanying influences of temperance and abstemiousness, of cleanliness and sanitation, of sick-visitation and domestic hygiene" ¹⁰⁶ Wesley's personal ethic was a conscientious application of what he believed to be the biblical definition of true religion, the loving God with all one's heart, and the loving one's neighbour as one's self. The Christian realisation that guided his actions as a Holy Club member in the 1730's (what we do to our fellow man, we effectively do to Christ) continued to determine his response to the desperate of mankind for the rest of his life. Wesley's social ethic was not simply an opinion that was compatible with his theology; it was the inescapable conclusion and the necessary application of his theology.

IV

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WESLEY'S WORK AND THEOLOGY FOR THE ANTISLAVERY MOVEMENT

In light of the fact that Wesley's total social ethic was a direct result of his theology, it can be asserted likewise, that his antislavery position was a consistent part of his social ethic, and also derived from his theology. This is true especially in light of those doctrines which carry profound antislavery implications. It remains therefore to explore

¹⁰⁶ William H. Paynter, Preface to the Second Edition of Wesley's Primitive Physic in the seventh edition (Plymouth, 1970) p. 2.

the significance of Wesley's work and his theology for the cause of antislavery. This will be done by examining some aspects of his direct and indirect influence.

The most easily identifiable example of Wesley's broad and direct influence must of course be his tract, "Thoughts Upon Slavery." As mentioned in Chapter VII, it was a key factor in the early American Methodist conflict over slavery, especially for the opposition voiced by Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury (even though this opposition was later softened). Andrews holds that it was responsible for the overt condemnation of slavery by American Methodism in 1790.¹⁰⁷ Certainly Thomas Rankin had adopted Wesley's position and was spreading it in the colonies. Rankin was one of the first Methodist preachers sent by Wesley to help in the fledgling American work, and he is credited with having preached the earliest recorded antislavery sermon by an American Methodist (July, 1775).¹⁰⁸

Undoubtedly, because the tract had been written by the father of Methodism it would have had wide influence, especially among Wesley's

¹⁰⁷ Andrews, op. cit., p.52.

¹⁰⁸ Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, "Thomas Rankin and the American Colonists," (Vol. XXXIX, June, 1973), pp. 26-7. Arriving in America in 1773, Rankin would have had access to the first American edition of Wesley's tract which appeared in Philadelphia in 1774. Addressing the Continental Congress he said "what a farce it was for them to contend for liberty when they themselves keep some hundreds of thousands of poor blacks in most cruel bondage"(p. 27).

Likewise the distinction of being the first person arrested in America for speaking against slavery goes to a Methodist minister, Jacob Gruber. He was preaching at a Maryland camp meeting (August, 1818) where a number of slave-owners were present. After arrest, Gruber was defended by Roger B. Taney, who later became the Chief-Justice of the United States, and author of the Dred-Scott decision. Gruber was acquitted. (David Thompson, John Wesley as a Social Reformer, pp. 63-9).

followers. One of his preachers, and close friends, Samuel Bradburn, wrote an excellent tract in 1792, making good use of Wesley's pamphlet.¹⁰⁹ But it also played a role beyond the scope of Methodism. Granville Sharp commended it highly, and Benezet used it, even republishing it in America.¹¹⁰ Part of its value lies in the fact that when Wesley wrote it, he

. . . was still one of the very first to take up the cause of the negro. In the Church Bishop Warburton had deplored the evil of the traffic, and outside the Church Richard Baxter and the Quakers had also taken their stand. Apart from these one can only find a thin stream of literature from unknown writers.

And so this early and emphatic stand of Wesley has a double significance. It gave the prestige of a famous name to the movement, and it brought over to its side the host of people who looked upon Wesley as their example and their guide. 111

Roger Anstey concurs: "Considerable importance lay in the fact that Wesley 'was the earliest religious leader of the first rank to join the protest against slavery.'"¹¹²

The tract was again used in the nineteenth century when American Methodists began seriously to focus their attention on slavery. It was republished there in 1835 and 1856, and was quoted in the American periodicals, Zion's Watchman (1842) and Zion's Herald (1844) in opposition to American Methodism's reticence at taking a stand against

¹⁰⁹ Samuel Bradburn, Address to the People Called Methodists: Concerning the Wickedness of Encouraging Slavery (London, 1792).

¹¹⁰ See Appendix III, pp. 390-91.

¹¹¹ Edwards, p. 115.

¹¹² Anstey, op. cit., pp. 240-1 (quoting Dictionary of National Biography).

slavery.¹¹³ Although Elliott's description of the tract was exaggerated (written in 1855), it demonstrates the high regard some still had for it: "Perhaps no publication ever did more against slavery and the slave trade than this tract"¹¹⁴ At least Wesley's position, as stated in his tract, was a factor in the American Methodist controversy on slavery which led to the division of the church in 1844. Those who opposed slavery claimed the authority of the founder of Methodism, from his written work.¹¹⁵

In addition to the tract, Wesley's personal influence against slavery was felt by a number of individuals. As mentioned above, Samuel Bradburn wrote against slavery. Bradburn was one of Wesley's trusted preachers as well as one of his more intimate friends. Wesley had helped him financially and enjoyed a rather fatherly relationship with "Sammy" and his wife Betsy. A touching letter of comfort exists from Wesley to Betsy on the death of Bradburn's son, and later, on Betsy's death, Wesley stood as counselor and friend, finally encouraging Samuel's remarriage.¹¹⁶ There is little doubt that Bradburn's hatred of slavery had been kindled by his mentor.

Wesley's ministry had also touched Nathaniel Gilbert. As seen above (p. 194) Gilbert returned to the West Indies where as Speaker of the

¹¹³ Matlack, The Anti-Slavery Struggle, pp. 242, 245, 95; The History of American Slavery and Methodism, pp. 21-23, 111-12.

¹¹⁴ Elliott, op. cit., p. 31.

¹¹⁵ Thompson, John Wesley as a Social Reformer, p. 69.

¹¹⁶ Some of the correspondence between Bradburn and Wesley can be found in Wesley, Works, Vol. XIII, pp. 123-6, and in Letters, but some interesting manuscript letters are extant in the John Rylands University Library, Manchester.

Assembly of Antigua it is probable that he endeavoured to improve the slaves' conditions. He also was instrumental in the conversion of many slaves and the establishing of Methodism among that black population. The influence continued however, as another Nathaniel Gilbert became the first chaplain of Sierra Leone in 1792.¹¹⁷ This was the son of Nathaniel Gilbert, Wesley's friend and convert.¹¹⁸ Professor Walls comments on how the "Gilbert family provides another instance of those numerous and sometimes unexpected links between the earlier evangelical movement and the Christian history of West Africa."¹¹⁹ Those same links can be seen in the Christian history of Antigua, as numerous Gilbert descendents carried on Christian ministry there, and their influence was even felt in England as some served parishes there.¹²⁰

It is interesting to find lines of connection between Wesley and others who were involved in the antislavery cause. John Newton, after his conversion had contact with John Wesley. In fact, Wesley had tried to assist when Newton encountered resistance upon seeking ordination.¹²¹

¹¹⁷A. F. Walls, WHS Proceedings, (Vol. 34, Part VI, June, 1964) p. 151.

¹¹⁸Frank Baker, "The Origins of Methodism in the West Indies, The Story of the Gilbert Family," London Quarterly and Holborn Review, Vol. 185, 1960, p. 14.

¹¹⁹Walls. op. cit., p. 151.

¹²⁰For a brief but informative tracing of the Gilbert family, and their widespread ministries, Antigua, Africa and England, see Baker, London Quarterly and Holborn Review, Vol. 185, 1960, pp. 9-17. See also Thompson, Nathaniel Gilbert, passim.

¹²¹Wesley, Works, Vol. II, p. 531 ("Journal," March 13, 1760).

Wesley attempted to persuade Newton to become one of his itinerant preachers. Newton was particularly sympathetic to the Methodists, even being labelled with that nickname himself during his early years of ministry, and the spark of his evangelicalism was fanned, particularly by Whitefield. Without this early evangelical influence, it is questionable whether he would have developed such strong ties with other Evangelicals, particularly those involved in antislavery who most probably persuaded him to speak out against the slave trade.¹²²

Henry Venn is well known for his vital role among the Clapham Sect, as curate of Holy Trinity Church. Less well known is the fact that in his early years he felt a spiritual kinship with Wesley, and requested the latter to write him a personal commission for ministry:

Very shortly . . . I am to be placed in a cure near this city And as I have often experienced your words to be as thunder to my drowsy soul, I presume, though a stranger, to become a petitioner, begging you would send me a personal charge, to take heed to feed the flock committed to me. 123

Venn could not be termed a "follower" of Wesley, and even acknowledged that he "ever may in some points differ" with Wesley, but at the same time he noted the "benefit and light" received from Wesley's works and

¹²²Newton's being influenced by Whitefield is partly related to Wesley's influence. It would be presuming too much to say that Wesley was the major influence on Whitefield. Indeed the influence was reciprocal, Wesley being the leader in those formative years of the Holy Club (Whitefield being a member), but Whitefield introducing Wesley to field preaching, and later turning many of his converts over to Wesley for nurture. Thus, what is being said here is not that Wesley and Whitefield had direct influence on Newton's antislavery stand, but on his associations, which did later shape his antislavery activity.

¹²³Henry Venn to John Wesley, March 21, 1754, quoted in John Telford, A Sect that Moved the World, (London, n.d.), p. 19.

preaching.¹²⁴ As the evangelical spirit moved across the country and influenced such men, Wesley was seen to personify that spirit. How significant that the curacy to which Venn referred in his request was that of Clapham.¹²⁵

Very intriguing also are the possible lines of influence from Wesley to Wilberforce. As a boy of nine Wilberforce came under the influence of Methodism while he lived with an aunt who was an admirer of Whitefield. By the time he was twelve, he had professed conversion, so much so that his worried mother whisked him away from the aunt's influence, back to the non-Methodist safety of Hull. Furneaux makes a good case that Wilberforce remained steadfast in his new faith until 1774 when he was fifteen years old.¹²⁶ But by the end of that year his lapse from Methodism had occurred.¹²⁷ Some eleven years later

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 20. In later years Venn did differ, and rather strongly with Wesley's doctrine of perfection, but it can be argued that much of the difference was based on a misunderstanding of Wesley's true position. This was frequently the case with those who took issue with this doctrine.

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 21. Regarding the parts played by Henry and John Venn in the "Clapham Sect," see E. M. Howse, Saints in Politics, (Toronto, 1952).

¹²⁶Furneaux, op. cit., pp. 5, 8-9. The close relationship between Wilberforce and his aunt and uncle (also named William Wilberforce) must have continued for the rest of their lives as they bequeathed their Wimbledon villa to him. Part of that house is still extant, known as Lauriston Cottage, owned by Mr. Whitehead (6 South Side Common, Wimbledon). Wilberforce lived in the house for a time, entertaining close friends such as Pitt, (during twentieth century modifications of the house, a signal bell was discovered with the label: "Mr. Pitt's room"). The yard contained the famous tree under which supposedly the conversation took place between Wilberforce and Pitt about the former taking up the antislavery cause. (Personal conversation between Mr. Whitehead and the author, June, 1980).

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 10.

Wilberforce's second conversion began while he was on a Continental tour with Isaac Milner. Together they read Doddridge's Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul. By this time Wilberforce was already involved in politics, as a Member for Hull, and therefore privately sought counsel from John Newton. Newton advised him concerning his spiritual state, and also as a long time friend of Wilberforce's Methodist aunt, helped to re-establish that relationship. Newton also encouraged Wilberforce to remain in politics.¹²⁸ It is impossible to ferret out the various strands of influence on a person's life, but in Wilberforce's spiritual pilgrimage can be seen the interconnectedness and interworking of evangelical forces. Henry Venn's preaching had even been heard by Wilberforce in the spring of 1785.¹²⁹ It would be presumptuous to link Wilberforce too closely to Wesley's influence, and yet Wesley was an integral part of the entire evangelical picture, and Wilberforce was touched by many personalities who comprised that picture. As seen above, there is some connection between Newton, Whitefield and Wesley (and even Venn), and while Wilberforce was grateful, for political reasons, to have been separated from the Methodists, he considered himself to be spiritually at one with them, as indicated in a 1786 diary entry: "Expect to hear myself now universally given out to be a Methodist:

¹²⁸ Anstey, op. cit., p. 251, n. points out that actually Wilberforce had been in touch with Newton since 1777, some eight years prior to his conversion in 1785. Furneaux, op. cit., pp. 32-53 gives a lucid account of Wilberforce's conversion and spiritual pilgrimage but does not mention the contact with Newton from 1777.

¹²⁹ Telford, A Sect That Moved the World, p. 100, quoting Henry Venn: "'Mr, Wilberforce has been at the /Surrey/ chapel, and attends the preaching /Venn's/ constantly. Much he has to give up! And what will be the issue, who can say?'"

may God grant it may be said with truth."¹³⁰ Certainly Wilberforce held the Wesleys in high regard as demonstrated by the annuity he provided for Charles Wesley's widow. He felt a kinship with the religion they professed, and, as was indicated in Chapter I, Wilberforce's antislavery activity was a direct result of his understanding of Christianity and his personal Christian commitment.

The ties between Wilberforce and Wesleyan Methodism continued after Wesley's death. To the first Wesleyan Conference assembled following Wesley's death, Wilberforce appealed for help in petitioning against the trade. He supplied the ministers with copies of "Evidence" that had been used before a Select Committee of the House.¹³¹ The success of that appeal is seen by the fact that in 1791 Methodists secured some 229,426 signatures while other non-conforming groups combined secured 122,978.¹³² Andrews mentions that in 1807 the Methodists

¹³⁰ Furneaux, op. cit., p. 4ln., citing Wilberforce's journal entry for June 12, 1786. Furneaux clarifies that during this period, "the distinction between Evangelical and Methodist was often hard to draw." In Wesley's journal (February 24, 1789, he mentions talking with Wilberforce: "Mr. W^{ilberforce} called upon me and we had an agreeable and useful conversation. What a blessing it is to Mr. P^{itt} to have such a friend as this!" (Works, Vol. IV, pp. 445-6.) Wilberforce's comment for that day was: "I called on John Wesley - a fine fellow." (cited in Telford, A Sect That Moved the World, p. 107.)

¹³¹ WHS Proceedings, "The Evangelicals of Hull," (no author cited), Vol. XII, p. 130.

¹³² Wesley Studies, by Various Writers, (London, n.d.). The particular section here referred to was written by Richard Butterworth. In a perceptive study E. M. Hunt maintains that the slave trade agitation was essentially a religious campaign and was "the first time that public opinion had been roused to influence the House of Commons" (p. ii). Particularly east of the Pennines the agitation was carried on by nonconformists and Evangelicals who had nothing to gain financially by abolition. It is further stated that Samuel Bradburn supported the boycott in Manchester by personally giving up the use of West Indian produce. See E. M. Hunt, "The North of England Agitation for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1780-1800," (unpublished M.A. dissertation, Manchester, 1959), pp. ii, 156, 107.

supported Wilberforce, who otherwise may have lost his Parliamentary seat at York.¹³³

Without question, Wesley's tract and his direct and indirect contact with individuals involved in the antislavery cause were important. But Wesley aided the slave in an even greater, but less obvious way. Cooper has made an arresting statement regarding Wesley's role in antislavery:

Wesley's contribution to the emancipation of the negro has never been given thorough study, and yet there is hardly a person whose influence was more considerable. The name of John Wesley must be included along with Wilberforce, Clarkson, and Granville Sharp. 134

Similar comments have been made by other writers, but consistently they take the matter no further.¹³⁵ The truth of such a statement must

¹³³ Andrews, op. cit., p. 52. This is a difficult statement to verify, but it is true that the election was unexpectedly close, and that to a large extent, the common man, seeing Wilberforce's danger, came to his aid. See Furneaux, op. cit., pp. 268-71.

¹³⁴ Cooper, op. cit., p. 208.

¹³⁵ Indeed, Cooper's statement is remarkably close (without reference) to a statement by Edwards: "No thorough attempt seems to have been made to estimate [Wesley's] contribution to negro emancipation. And yet there is hardly any name more important, hardly any person whose influence was so considerable. When Wilberforce, Clarkson, and Granville Sharp are mentioned, the name of John Wesley must also be included." (Edwards, op. cit., p. 112) Likewise, in speaking of Wesley's attack on slavery, Hansen asserts that "abolition was hastened through his efforts." (William Albert Hansen, "John Wesley and the Rhetoric of Reform," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Oregon, 1972, p. 333) Sweetland (op. cit., p. 111) says "The relationship of Wesley's efforts in behalf of abolition to the eventual success of the movement is impossible to show. There is no doubt that the Methodists played an important part . . . in rousing public opinion to active opposition to slavery." Also, Bernard Semmel in The Methodist Revolution, p. 153, states that the final ending of the slave trade was "to a substantial extent accomplished through the good work of the Methodists and Evangelicals in 1807." And, in a more general statement, R. W. Dale claims that the antislavery movement was one of the "two great triumphs . . . that the Evangelical Revival may fairly claim." (R. W. Dale, The Evangelical Revival and Other Sermons, [London, 1880], p. 35.)

be illuminated by examining that contribution more specifically.

Dorothy Marshall hints at such an examination when she accurately points out that it was the work of Wesley and his followers (as well as the Evangelicals) that allowed the work of men such as Wilberforce, Clarkson and Sharp to have results as quickly as they did.¹³⁶ The fact is that by the end of the eighteenth century, the religious and emotional climate of England was such that it could respond to the claims and pleas of the abolitionists. Wesley's major contribution was in helping to create that climate. As Benezet played such a crucial part in the lives of the front line abolitionists such as Clarkson and Sharp, Wesley, as one of the key leaders of the evangelical revival helped to effect a dramatic change in the attitudes and abilities of the general populace.¹³⁷ Certainly the abolition of the slave trade succeeded because of many factors, and it is the conviction of the present writer that those many factors converged at the right historical "moment." But the preparation of the populace must be considered one of those factors, and in that regard, Wesley was one of those who helped to bring about the "fulness of time." If the stage was set for the antislavery leaders, Wesley was one of those who helped in that task. Following, we shall look at three areas in which he helped to temper the climate of England into one which could support ideals sympathetic to antislavery. These areas include 1) the spreading of the principles of democracy, 2) the popularising of Arminianism, and 3) the emphasising of the essential nature of Christian living, which Wesley did through his teaching of Christian Perfection.

¹³⁶ Dorothy Marshall, English People in the Eighteenth Century, (London, 1956), p. 157.

¹³⁷ Sweetland, (op. cit., p. 111) says that one of Wesley's great achievements was in serving as "educator of the poor, a field in which he had no rival."

It has been generally accepted that Wesley had a positive influence on his century (through his personal activity and through the organisation he built) in the areas of equality, liberty and justice. This influence has been acknowledged both by his contemporaries, and by subsequent historians.¹³⁸ Although Wesley expressed strong opposition to democracy as such,¹³⁹ his theological and ethical ideals fostered the principles and attitudes among the class of people he most successfully reached that would lead to democracy. An example of this is his defending freedom of the press and of speech even when the price involved evils he strongly opposed.¹⁴⁰ Warner feels that ". . . Wesleyanism made vigorous contributions to the process which undermined the foundations of the old standards and made new values of spirit and personality supreme. The very character of the movement compelled it to be a liberal force, because it created the context of liberalism. Yet all of its labels were conservative."¹⁴¹ In a very real sense, the way Wesley's thought laid the foundations for democracy occurred along the lines of his own philosophy of social change, infiltration rather than legislation,

¹³⁸ Madron, "The Political Thought of John Wesley," p. 210.

¹³⁹ In his "Calm Address to Our American Colonies," Wesley specifically stated that "No governments under heaven are so despotic as the republican; no subjects are governed in so arbitrary a manner as those of a commonwealth." "Republics show no mercy." (Wesley, Works, Vol. XI, p. 87). His most direct statements about democracy can be found in (Vol. XI) his "Thoughts Concerning the Origin of Power," "Thoughts Upon Liberty," "Some Observations of Liberty," see also above, pp. 206-7, 249, 250, especially n. 47.

¹⁴⁰ Wesley, Works, Vol. XI, p. 45 ("Thoughts Upon Liberty"). After describing a situation in which the press had been "continually" feeding "poison" to the public about the King, Wesley says: "But can anything be done to open the eyes, to restore the senses, of an infatuated nation? . . . But how is it possible . . . unless by restraining the licentiousness of the press? And is not this remedy worse than the disease?" See also p. 33 ("Free Thoughts On Public Affairs").

¹⁴¹ Warner, op. cit., pp. 276-7.

although he would not have subscribed to the end result, at least in title.¹⁴²

One of the values which Methodists incurred from Wesley, and the one which was extremely suggestive of democracy, was equality.¹⁴³ As seen in Chapter VIII, it appears throughout Wesley's theology, from his treatment of man's depravity to God's grace.¹⁴⁴ Coupled with the emphasis on industriousness and responsibility, a sense of equality enhanced an entire class' notion of self-respect, as well as respect for others. In practical terms the early societies failed to recognise class or wealth as determinants for leadership. As upper class converts were brought in, they were under the teaching and authority of the leaders who were usually from the poorer ranks. Women too, found positions of service and even leadership:

A servant girl, an itinerating carder and spinner, or a housewife, was not less acceptable than a woman of social position and influence or a member of the aristocracy The outstanding success of women as class leaders was evident, but a few women even undertook to serve as local preachers. It was a bold innovation . . . but Wesley based his approval of their conduct on scriptural precedent, and the fact that the women possessed an "extraordinary call" exactly like all the rest of the unordained preachers. 145

¹⁴² Warner explains that Wesleyanism, ". . . while liberal in its tendencies, . . . yet combated the particular doctrines advanced by early radicals. Its liberalism was unlabelled, and therein lay its power, for, unperceived, it spread a germinating influence. Priestly, the radical, gauged accurately what but few others saw when he predicted that Wesleyan Methodism would accomplish far more than its leaders could foresee, even while clothed in its conservative disguise." (Warner, op. cit., p. 277)

¹⁴³ Benjamin Kidd indicates that "the two doctrines which contributed most to producing the extinction of slavery were the doctrine of salvation and the doctrine of the equality of all men before the Deity." (Benjamin Kidd, Social Evolution /London, 1895/, p. 180). See also pp. 171 ff. for Kidd's evaluation that slavery was not abolished on intellectual grounds, but because of religion (specifically, altruism).

¹⁴⁴ See especially p. 251 above. Even regarding the simple matter of courtesy, Wesley said ". . . see that you are courteous toward all men . . . whether they are high or low, rich or poor, superior or inferior to you . . . the lowest and the worst have a claim to our courtesy," Works, Vol. VII, p. 145.

¹⁴⁵ Warner, op. cit., pp. 364-5.

As democratic principles took root among Wesley's followers, there could be no question of their application to life situations. For example, while Wesley's leadership of the Methodists could in no manner be described as democratic, after his death the values he inspired led to the separation of the "New Connexion." The split was largely over the question of church government, the new group desiring a more democratic form. And to be sure, those principles (especially equality) found expression in the negro question. Margaret Hodgen argues that Wesley's attitude toward the negro "gave great impetus to the anti-slavery movement," and without his influence (the "sympathetic evaluation of the Negro culture," i.e., equality) "emancipation might well have been long delayed."¹⁴⁶ Wesley's sentiments were carried on, and can be seen in Richard Watson's sermon to the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in 1824. The sermon which is based on the text of I Peter ii. 17, "Honour all men," defends racial equality, and shows the importance of religious instruction to West Indian slaves.¹⁴⁷

It is clearly a paradox that Wesley, a Tory at heart and opposed to revolution, was instrumental in bringing about a liberal revolution.¹⁴⁸ A number of the leaders of the democratic movement came from Methodism where they had gained a sense of right and a love of justice which, coupled with their faith motivated them toward social reform,¹⁴⁹ one of these reforms being the ending of slavery.

¹⁴⁶Hodgen, op. cit., p. 323.

¹⁴⁷Richard Watson, The Religious Instruction of the Slaves in the West India Colonies Advocated and Defended, (London, 1824).

¹⁴⁸Semmel, op. cit., p. 195. Green reflects the same paradox: "No man ever stood at the head of a great revolution whose temper was so anti-revolutionary." (John Richard Green, A Short History of the English People [London, 1885], p. 772.)

¹⁴⁹WHS Proceedings, Vol. XV, pp. 219-20.

Not unrelated to instilling democratic ideals, Wesley also played a vital role in popularising Arminianism. He considered himself an Arminian (even calling his chief publication "The Arminian Magazine") particularly in opposing predestination and supporting universal grace.¹⁵⁰ But he felt this position was completely in line with "orthodox" Anglican theology. The significant fact however, is that he was successful in spreading Arminian ideas among the people. Many nineteenth and twentieth century historians credit him with being ". . . the chief instrument in the revival and extension of the doctrines of an evangelical Arminianism" ¹⁵¹ His major polemical writings were against hyper-Calvinism and the problems he believed it produced.¹⁵² Certainly his break with George Whitefield occurred over this issue.

The Calvinism of the eighteenth century had been used to maintain a social and economic status quo. The tenets of predestination and election could be (and were) applied to infer a divinely ordained world

¹⁵⁰For Wesley's concise statements on his view of Arminianism, and on his opposition to predestination, see his pamphlet "What is an Arminian?" (Works, Vol. X, pp. 358-61), and his sermon "Free Grace" (Works, Vol. VII, pp. 373-86).

¹⁵¹John Kirk, quoted by Alfred H. Pask, "The Influence of Arminius on John Wesley," in The London Quarterly and Holborn Review, Vol. 185, 1960, p. 259. Pask states that "later judgement would broadly endorse this /statement by Kirk/. A similar nineteenth century position is reflected by Dale (op. cit., pp. 21-2) in his statement: "The decay of Calvinism among Evangelical Nonconformists has been largely due to the influence of Methodism. John Wesley rendered us immense service by the vigour with which he asserted the moral freedom of man against the Calvinistic doctrine of the Divine decrees, and the universality of the Atonement as against the Calvinistic doctrine which limited the relations of the death of Christ to the elect."

¹⁵²One of Wesley's tracts against antinomianism is entitled "A Blow at the Root; or, Christ Stabbed in the House of His Friends," (Works, Vol. X, pp. 364-9). The title is indicative of the seriousness with which Wesley considered the problem, and the tract posits the availability of grace by which man can "bear the image of God on earth."

system. James Ramsay was typical of his age in believing that every man had his "station,"¹⁵³ (whether servant, freeholder, noble or king) and because it was a result of God's election, it was not to be tampered with. What could be better than the authority of religion to "salve the conscience of the possessing," and at the same time "reconcile the poorer groups to the injustice of their lot?"¹⁵⁴ Admittedly, established religious beliefs were only one factor in maintaining the social order, but indeed, they were a pivotal factor.

One result of Wesley's teaching was a general softening of the harsh Calvinism of the eighteenth century. His rejection of predestination and the resulting "elect," began to destroy the walls which separated the classes. The accepted fatalism could be countered as responsibility was again seen to have a place within man. Resignation could be replaced by industry and motivation. Wesley overtly rejected the belief that the poor were so because of their own inability, or because of God's placing of them. Poverty was simply a result of improper (unjust and unloving) distribution of the community's resources. Likewise he could not tolerate any system of injustice on the grounds that its presence indicated divine approval. His teachings were absorbed by his followers. Incredibly (for that age) many did break out of the bonds of poverty, develop a new self respect and establish a strong working class. Wesley's brand of Arminianism enabled man to share in the responsibility of his own situation, both temporal and eternal. With responsibility came a sense of inspiration, the desire to change things. The shifting from an outlook of fatalism to one of productive change had implications beyond the individual in his own circumstances. It meant that the larger, collective

¹⁵³ Ramsay, An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of the African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies, p. 3.

¹⁵⁴ Warner, op. cit., p. 10.

problems of injustice and inhumanity need not go unprotested or be accepted as inevitable. This was bound to affect the perspective on social change. Man was not a helpless victim; he could work to alter his conditions, and he could also work to alter those of his fellows.

What Wesley taught in this regard was not revolutionary in the sense of being new, but in the fact that he successfully proliferated such ideas. People believed them and began to act upon them. In this respect, the emotional climate of the country began to change. Very interesting is the fact that the philosophies of the men of this study comply with these attitudes. Not one of them could be considered a rigid Calvinist. John Newton comes closest to a Calvinist position, but even he is not dogmatic about it.¹⁵⁵ Certainly the point cannot be pressed too far. It is likely that those same men would not have claimed affinity with Arminius (partly because of the perjorative use of that term), but the logical deductions of their philosophies were more compatible with Arminianism than with rigid Calvinism. It will be acknowledged that confirmed Calvinists have frequently acted (in terms of trying to effect change) in ways that run counter to an assumed predestination. Suffice it to say that men such as Wilberforce, Clarkson and Sharp acted in ways that demonstrated their belief that circumstances could be changed. In fact, each of them felt a sense of responsibility

¹⁵⁵In addressing the issue of theological controversy, Newton declared himself a defender of the Bible, far more than of a theological system. He felt this to be particularly important when the Bible appeared to support contradictory systems: ". . . an attachment to a rigid system is dangerous. Luther once turned out the epistle of St. James, because it disturbed his system. I shall preach, perhaps very usefully upon two opposite texts, while kept apart; but, if I attempt nicely to reconcile them, it is ten to one if I do not begin to bungle." (Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, [London, 1835], p. 289).

to have a hand in that change. Sharp's view is presented most systematically in his Law of Nature and Principles of Action in Man, wherein he poses man's autonomy.¹⁵⁶ This position is remarkably close to Wesley's view of man's general ability to choose and to initiate. It is clearly contrary to the Calvinism of the eighteenth century.¹⁵⁷

It is impossible to determine the relationship of the philosophies of the abolitionists (in this study) to Wesley's Arminianism. That remains in the area of speculation. But it can safely be said that these men reflect a temperateness of the late eighteenth century that was relatively recent, and at least to some extent the result of the "leaven" of Wesley's work. The trend of a growing Arminianism can be seen even more clearly in attitudes of the early nineteenth century in America. In her perceptive study, Anne Loveland relates that religious leaders of that period (some of whom were followers of Jonathan Edwards) "unwittingly adopted certain humanistic, Arminian doctrines of their opponents."¹⁵⁸ The change could be seen in a shift of focus from man's inability to his ability, and from a piety which centered on God alone, to piety centered on benevolence to humanity.¹⁵⁹ The result was "a new

¹⁵⁶ See Appendix I for a brief summary of this tract. (p. 380, below).

¹⁵⁷ Roger Anstey concurs that there was a marked contrast in the theology of the beginning and end of the eighteenth century, especially regarding antislavery implications. In the early part of the century, "men evidently believed that to question the ethical basis of slavery, given a fallen world, would be to question God's purposes The world of the late eighteenth century was quite different." "Nowhere is the change of view more marked than in attitudes toward slavery and the slave trade." (Anstey, op. cit., pp. 94-5)

¹⁵⁸ Anne C. Loveland, "Evangelicalism and 'Immediate Emancipation' in American Antislavery Thought," Journal of Southern History, Vol. XXXII (May, 1966), p. 175.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 176.

concept of sin which abolitionists applied to slavery. Once benevolence was defined as a concern for 'our fellow creatures' or the rights of others sin acquired a social connotation."¹⁶⁰ Man's (the abolitionists) free will and moral responsibility were no longer denied, but assumed:

When abolitionists demanded immediate emancipation, they were not merely saying that slavery should be abolished or that it should be abolished 'now;' They were also arguing that abolition was fully within man's power and completely dependent upon his initiative. 161

The fact is that the attitudes which made possible that shift among the American abolitionists in the 1820's and 1830's, were very obviously present among the British abolitionists well before the turn of the century. Further, they were distinguishing characteristics of Wesley's message. His Arminianism, contrasted with deterministic Calvinism, allowed him to advocate man's ability (under grace), and benevolence was integral to his idea of true religion. Wesley's view of man, as seen throughout this study is compatible with the attitudes and values necessary for men to take seriously a task such as the abolitionists undertook. As Tannenbaum reflects in his classic study: ". . . if one thing stands out clearly from the study of slavery, it is that the definition of man as a moral being proved the most important influence both in the treatment of the slave and in the final abolition of slavery."¹⁶² Wesley's Arminianism brought a new dimension to the general understanding of man.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., p. 181.

¹⁶¹Ibid., p. 185.

¹⁶²Frank Tannenbaum, Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas, (New York, 1947), p. vii.

Finally, Wesley's teaching of Christian perfection was relevant to the religious climate of England during the years of the antislavery struggle. It must be clarified that his promulgating a specific term such as "perfection," or "sanctification," is not of central importance. Indeed, many of his contemporaries rejected such titles.¹⁶³ The importance lies in the content of Wesley's teaching. It was integral to his soteriology and his doctrine of man. In his insistence on the primacy and inseparability of loving God and neighbour, the teaching was productive of the kind of benevolence which Loveland refers to. Good works were not merely encouraged by Wesley's doctrine of perfection, they were seen as indisputably necessary. For evidence of this, one need look only to Wesley's opponents. Throughout his life he was accused of being a "papist," preaching salvation by works. The truth of the matter is that he rejected the passivity of the Moravians and taught that the major proof of faith is works, and that benevolence was also an essential means of Christian growth. As Warner points out, ". . . the unique theme of every [Wesley] sermon [was] the immediate moral transformation of character, authenticated not by a remotely realized salvation, but by the discernable evidences of social conduct."¹⁶⁴ The fact was that new moral demands were being put on Christians, especially within Methodism, but also within Evangelicalism in general.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Henry Venn, in a letter to his daughter (1789) took issue with Wesley on perfection, but had fallen into the common misunderstanding of Wesley's opponents that he taught an absolute or "sinless" perfection. See Telford, A Sect That Moved the World, pp. 56-8.

¹⁶⁴ Warner, op. cit., p. 137. See also pp. 58-9.

¹⁶⁵ Curtin, op. cit., p. 54.

What Wesley believed and taught under the head of "perfection," is completely consistent with what could be called "Christian humanitarianism." As seen in this study, the dominant motivating factor of the abolitionists was this Christian humanitarianism. Their opposition to slavery was based on humanitarian grounds in the broad sense (they accepted the need for justice and fair treatment of fellow human beings), and the Christian element is seen in their persistence from a sense of "call," and their constant reference to the golden rule. In a word, they attempted to love God and serve him by loving and serving their fellows, Wesley's fundamental definition of perfection, even Christianity. While it cannot be claimed that the abolitionists acknowledged or were even aware of a connection between their philosophies and actions and Wesley's doctrine, it is clear that their conclusions and motivation were consistent with the line he took. The foundation he laid among the Methodists was congruent with the presuppositions of the abolitionists. Wilberforce's own statement that "it is the duty of every man to promote the happiness of his fellow-creatures to the utmost of his power"¹⁶⁶ is similar to Wesley's description of sanctified Christians, who "feel as sincere, fervent, constant a desire for the happiness of every man . . . as for their own."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Wilberforce, Practical View, p. vii, quoted in Anstey, op. cit., p. 163.

¹⁶⁷ Wesley, Works, Vol. XI, p. 418 ("Plain Account of Christian Perfection"). This passage is also quoted above, (Perfection), p. 308. In his sermon "The Way to the Kingdom" (Vol. V, p. 79) Wesley speaks of loving one's neighbour with an "invariable thirst after his happiness."

The most graphic example of these attitudes can be found in Sharp's hermeneutic wherein he interpreted the entire Biblical treatment of the question of slavery in light of the commands to love God and neighbour.¹⁶⁸ What he termed the "Law of liberty" (loving one's neighbour as oneself), is remarkably close to the scriptural basis that Wesley used repeatedly throughout his works. The same theme is obvious in the writings of Ramsay, Clarkson, Benezet and Wilberforce, and usually called the "law of love." It is noteworthy that Wesley's teaching of these principles occurred from 1725, but from the 1740's this emphasis gained pre-eminence in his preaching. Preceding the writings of the abolitionists in this study, it is conceivable that the core of Wesley's teaching (perhaps disassociated from some of the labels) had time to be disseminated among evangelical Christians. At least the fundamental thought (the primacy of loving God and neighbour as essential to Christianity) would have had increased visibility because of the growing Methodist movement.

Roger Anstey summarises the eighteenth century evangelical theological developments that led to increased antislavery sentiment. He notes that 1) salvation was understood in terms of redemption, 2) this applied not only to spiritual but also to physical bondage, 3) emphasis on the law of love unequivocally condemned slavery, and 4) the metaphors used to describe a spiritual condition drew upon the image of physical slavery.¹⁶⁹ The result was inescapable, and "evangelical theology . . . had to mark down slavery, and the slave trade . . . as the object of attack."¹⁷⁰ But significantly, these four characteristics of theological development are

¹⁶⁸ See above, pp. 129-37.

¹⁶⁹ Anstey, op. cit., pp. 189-90.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 193.

very apparent in Wesley's theology. The law of love became the hall-mark of his doctrine of perfection, and that doctrine was the completion of the entire process of salvation. The hymns of the Wesleys, which speak clearly regarding their theology are replete with the images of slavery and freedom.

Again, while philosophical thought prepared the world intellectually for freedom by elevating the concepts of liberty, benevolence and happiness,¹⁷¹ these values were also embedded in evangelical theology, specifically in Wesley's theology. The source of the three concepts matters little. What matters is that the audience of the philosophes was a different segment of society than that of the theologians. The ideas were becoming widespread.

Without doubt, the Evangelical Revival played a major part in the abolition of the slave trade, and of slavery. And Wesley was a major figure of that revival. While it has often been claimed that Wesley was the father of the revival, the claim is extravagant and wide of the mark. Admittedly such a belief simplifies much of history; if the revival is responsible (largely) for the antislavery campaign, and Wesley is the father of the revival, the effectiveness of antislavery can be directly attributed to him. However, the truth is more complex and interwoven but equally significant. In fact, the beginning of the revival pre-dates Wesley's conversion, and many of the Anglicans who turned Evangelical did so completely independently of Wesley or Whitefield.¹⁷² Anstey sees seeds of the revival in the writings of

¹⁷¹Ibid., pp. 96ff.

¹⁷²For an excellent discussion of the sources of the Evangelical Revival, see C. V. Bennett and J. D. Walsh, Essays in Modern English Church History, (London, 1966) pp. 132-62, "Origins of the Evangelical Revival," by J. D. Walsh.

William Law and Philip Doddridge.¹⁷³ Regardless, Wesley served the different, but very important role of spreading the spirit of the revival, and disseminating the principles of authentic Christianity. That he succeeded in this there can be no doubt. And that these principles carried deep social implications which were applied by eighteenth century England, there can also be no doubt. As such, Wesley can be considered a major contributor to the cause of antislavery. His taking the revival to the people of the land (with its accompanying social influences) helped to establish a receptive climate for antislavery. The example of his own social organisation (within Methodism) set a precedent and gave encouragement for what could be accomplished by co-operative effort.¹⁷⁴ In this context, Wesley can accurately be called a great social reformer, particularly if understood from an eighteenth century perspective.¹⁷⁵ He became a powerful force in confronting the great social needs of the latter half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By his influencing the emotional and religious climate of the late eighteenth century he served as a co-worker with those who gave their lives solely to the cause of the slave.

He called upon his followers and upon all Christians to be "citizens of the world" and "claim a share in the happiness of all the inhabitants of it;" to be agents of change by "being social, open, active Christians" and to subscribe to the higher ethic of love, the more

¹⁷³Anstey, op. cit., pp. 164 ff.

¹⁷⁴Warner concurs, stating that in this way Wesley motivated the reforms of the nineteenth century (op. cit., p. 203).

¹⁷⁵Whaling, op. cit., pp. 56-7.

excellent way.¹⁷⁶ His plea was fulfilled in the lives of the abolitionists. Through their combined commitment and tireless labours, the heartfelt request of John Wesley's own prayer was finally answered:

O thou God of love . . .

Father of the spirits of all flesh . . . who hast mingled of one blood all the nations upon earth; have compassion upon these outcasts of men . . . arise, and help these that have no helper, whose blood is spilt upon the ground like water!

O burst thou all their chains in sunder; more especially the chains of their sins! Thou Saviour of all, make them free, that they may be free in deed! ¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Wesley, Works, Vol. V, p. 274; p. 303 ("Sermon on the Mount," Discourses II and IV, respectively.)

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., Vol. XI, p. 79 ("Thoughts Upon Slavery").

APPENDIX ONE

I. An Overview of Granville Sharp's four Tracts in which he develops a Biblical Perspective on Slavery, 1776.

Sharp's initial involvement with Slavery pertained to the legal aspect. His work with Strong and Somerset required that he first ascertain the position of the law in regard to slavery in England, and then that he defend that position, and expose the public to it so that it would become the national legal ruling or opinion. The landmark case was the Somerset case of 1772 wherein Lord Mansfield ruled that slavery could not legally exist in England.

- Long a student of the Bible, Sharp now turned his research efforts toward Biblical principles and perspectives related to slavery. He was motivated both by his own curiosity to look in depth at what the Bible said about slavery, and by the fact that others were beginning to justify slavery on Biblical grounds. The spark was fanned when Dr. Burton of the SPG responded to Benezet that the Bible did not oppose slavery, in fact "the contrary [was] very plainly implied in the precepts given by the Apostles"¹ [Note 1. Letter from Dr. Burton of the SPG to Benezet, 3 February, 1768, quoted in Brookes, Friend Anthony Benezet, 1937, p. 417-18, and in Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823, 1975, p. 375.] The spark became a bright flame, however when the Reverend Thomas Thompson, missionary of the SPG, published a Biblical defence of slavery and the slave trade.² [Note 2. Letter from Sharp to the Archbishop of Canterbury, 1 August, 1786, quoted in Hoare, Memoirs of Granville Sharp, 1820, pp. 262-3.] The result was Sharp's scriptural findings, some 959 pages, published in 1776 under the following titles:
- (1) The Just Limitation of Slavery in the Laws of God, compared with the unbounded Claims of the African Traders and British American Slaveholders.
 - (2) The Law of Passive Obedience, or Christian Submission to Personal Injuries: Wherein is shewn, that the several Texts of scripture, which command the entire submission of servants or slaves to their masters, cannot authorize the latter to exact an involuntary servitude, not, in the least degree, justify the claims of modern Slaveholders.
 - (3) The Law of Liberty, or, Royal Law, By which all Mankind will certainly be judged! Earnestly Recommended to the Serious Consideration of all Slaveholders and Slavedealers.
 - (4) The Law of Retribution; or, A Serious Warning to Great Britain and Her Colonies, Founded on unquestionable Examples of God's Temporal Vengeance Against Tyrants, Slave-Holders, and Oppressors.

THE JUST LIMITATION OF SLAVERY IN THE LAWS OF GOD: (67 pages) In this, Sharp refutes those who support slavery on the basis of scripture. He maintains that the Old Testament did not condone slavery of fellow Jews, and proceeds logically that Christ and the New Testament posit that all men are our brothers (pp. 18-19):

Lev. 19:33-34 condemns oppression of the stranger reminding that "you" were once strangers in Egypt. Further, the OT admonishes to love one's neighbor as one's self.

Old Testament laws to enslave were temporary, and were only given to the Jews (pp. 12-13).

In these two points, Sharp seems to approach the critical method, citing the context and principle of a passage of scripture, rather than simply quoting a passage as "proof."

Regarding the OT and enslaving of Jews, he maintains that it was never allowed without the consent of the slave (p.14).

He rejects the "curse of Ham" as justification of slavery because Africans were not descended from Canaan (the recipient of Noah's curse /Gen. 9:25_7, but from Ham's other three sons: Cush, Misraim, and Phut (p. 48).

The tract uses much Old Testament and some New Testament material. Sharp cites Christ and deals with the Biblical principles of loving one's neighbor as one's self.

THE LAW OF PASSIVE OBEDIENCE, OR CHRISTIAN SUBMISSION TO PERSONAL INJURIES: (92 pages) This tract is Sharp's refutation of those who support slavery by quoting Paul's words that slaves should obey their masters. Sharp relies exclusively on the New Testament. Two major issues are addressed: the significance of Paul's advice to the question of slavery, and the Biblical injunction to obey those in authority.

- A. Regarding Paul's advice on slaves' obedience to master, Sharp suggests that although this is true, it in no way condones or justifies the behavior of masters. The oft cited texts were written to Christian slaves, not masters. If there had been many passages written to Christian masters, we would have a totally different perspective. Thus, these passages addressed to slaves should not be used, (although they often are) to condone slavery and the masters' behavior (p. 11).
- B. Sharp does an interesting job of establishing perspective for the Romans 8 passage which requires obedience to those in authority (pp. 70-71). His point is that the command is to obey those who uphold the law, justice and peace. If people in authority (rulers) do not support justice and peace, and law based on these principles, they must be confronted and censured. Paul and Jesus rebuked the high priest under similar circumstances, as did Peter and John when they refused to stop teaching, deciding to obey God rather than the rulers.

Sharp's concluding point is that it is the responsibility of all men to vindicate the cause of truth, justice and righteousness (p. 89).

THE LAW OF LIBERTY, OR, ROYAL LAW, BY WHICH ALL MANKIND WILL CERTAINLY BE JUDGED! (50 pages) Here Sharp deals with the duty of Christian masters to their slaves, and explores the legality or illegality of slavery among Christians (pp. 5-6). The first section is Sharp's exposition of what he calls the "law of liberty," or the second commandment, to love one's neighbor as one's self. This is applied to slavery and oppression (p. 23).

The last section deals with the consequences of breaking the law of liberty. Here Sharp cites Matthew 25 ("inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brothers, you have done it unto me") and relates the result: "Depart from me . . . into eternal fire." He further notes that having respect of persons is also breaking the law of love, and cites the text: "They shall have judgment without mercy that have showed no mercy" (p. 39).

The tract is ended by pointing to slavery as a national sin. As such it will affect everyone in the nation, just as in the Old Testament story of Achan; until he was routed, the battle was lost.

THE LAW OF RETRIBUTION: OR, A SERIOUS WARNING TO GREAT BRITAIN AND HER COLONIES: (340 pages) The Old Testament is the primary source for this tract, by which Sharp demonstrates the vengeance of God to those who break his law and do not repent. He points out that slaveholders are guilty of oppressing the stranger, and love of mammon (the latter in that they desire gain, rather than God) (pp. 300-301). Many specific examples of God's vengeance are noted from the Old Testament and direct applications are made to England and America warning them of similar fate. In fact, Sharp notes that slavery itself is often one of God's methods of dealing his retribution (pp. 206-7). He sees the war with America as part of God's judgment (p. 251).

This tract offers a good example of Sharp's eccentricity. In contrast to his relatively concise Law of Liberty and Passive Obedience, Retribution takes 340 pages, often using massive footnotes, and even footnotes appended to footnotes. The tract ends with an appeal to the Lords to act in behalf of England before it is too late.

In Retribution one might perceive Sharp's motive to be akin to that of the Old Testament prophet, working to avert God's wrath, but now for the benefit of England and America.

In 1777, the year following the publication of the above four tracts, Sharp published his most definitive statement on the nature of man. Although it is not a work designed to combat slavery, as were the others, its position on the worth and dignity of man has strong implications for that issue, and lends insight into Sharp's motivation in working against slavery.

II. An Overview of Granville Sharp's Tract on the Nature of Man, 1777. THE LAW OF NATURE AND PRINCIPLES OF ACTION IN MAN (410 pages)

Operational within all of life is what Sharp calls the "law of nature." It can be observed in animal behavior, particularly when an animal responds to help another, or cares for its young (pp. 1-10). This law of nature has also touched men, who in fact are better off with only this, written on their hearts, than to be corrupted by contact with civilized men who are evil (pp. 36-7,n.) He maintains that although no man is perfect, likewise, not all are depraved (p. 56).

Once that foundation is laid, Sharp begins to name and qualify "principles of action in man," in order to discover "the universal principle of action." He explores the following and finds them certainly to be principles of action, but not THE UNIVERSAL ONE:

- the "influence of Spiritual enemies is indeed a distinct Principle" (pp. 18-19).
- knowledge of good and evil. Indeed, a principle, but not the universal one because man does not then do what he knows (pp. 57-8).
- to seek after happiness is not a principle of action because happiness is not a cause, but an effect. On the contrary, obedience to God is a cause (pp. 58 ff.)
- self-love; (p. 64) certainly a principle of action, but not the universal one.
- to love one's neighbor as one's self: Sharp calls this a "'fundamental axiom of the Law of Nature' / and it / ought to be 'the universal principle of action in Man'" but it is not.
- affections (pp. 111-112),
- spiritual adversaries, and
- self preservation are principles, but not the universal one.

Finally, Sharp posits that "The Divine influence of the Holy Spirit upon Mankind" is the "Supreme 'Principle of Action in Man'" (p. 198). And yet, this does not alter the fact that man exercises freedom of choice (p. 193).

This tract gives the greatest insight into Sharp's doctrine of man. There appears a kinship to Wesley's thought when Sharp mentions the "Divine Nature, which Human Nature is rendered capable of acquiring, through the Divine Mediator between God and Man" (p. 289). He also sees Christ as the epitome of what man can be. The role of Christ was to be glorified as man, not only as God: "It was not only in his Divine Nature, that the Son was to be thus glorified, but expressly as 'Man' so that the Nature of Man is indeed exalted in Christ to the highest pitch of glory!" (p. 341) Again, the Wesleyan idea of the role of the Holy Spirit in enabling man to experience his potential is seen in Sharp. After defending the Holy Spirit as fully God, and part of the Godhead, Sharp says: "Without a due sense of this supreme Dignity of the Holy Spirit, we should form but a very unworthy idea of the real Dignity of Human Nature, which (as I have already shewn) is not only capable of receiving the Gift, or internal Communication, of that glorious and eternal Free Spirit (158) of God, as a Principle of Action, but is absolutely entitled even to claim that wonderful participation of the Divine Nature! to claim it" (pp. 391-2). Because of the mediating work of Christ, and the present influence of the Holy Spirit, for Sharp, man not only had dignity and goodness in his nature, but he could achieve his potential.

APPENDIX TWO

TRANSCRIPT OF WESLEY'S MANUSCRIPT SERMON ON GENESIS 1:27

The following is a transcript of Wesley's unpublished sermon on Genesis 1:27. The original (dated 1730) is hand written in Wesley's selfdevised shorthand and is housed in the John Rylands University Library, Manchester. In order to represent the original manuscript as accurately as possible, the syntax has not been altered, even where awkward. Likewise, Wesley's own outlining system of numbers has been left. To aid in making reference to this sermon, Wesley's manuscript pagination is noted in the margin, in parentheses. Within the thesis, Wesley's page numbers are referred to.

(p.1)

In the first Chapter of Genesis at the 27th verse it is thus written: 'So God created man in his own Image.'

A truth that does so much Honor to Human Nature, that gives so advantageous an account of it as this, could not fail, one would think, of being well entertained by all to whom that nature belonged. And accordingly some there have been in all ages who gladly received and firmly retained it: Who asserted, not only that man was sprung from God, but that he was His likeness from whom he sprung: That, the Image of his Divine Parent, was still visible upon him; who had transfused as much of Himself in this his picture as the materials on which he drew would allow.

But to this it has constantly been opposed, If man was made in the Image of God, whence flow those numberless imperfections, that stain and dishonor his nature. Why is his body exposed to sickness and pain, and at last to a total dissolution? Why is his soul still more disgraced and deformed by ignorance and error, by unnatural passions, and what is worse than all, as it contains them all, by vice? A fine picture, this ignorant, wretched, guilty creature, of a wise, happy and Holy Creator!

(p.2)

I am ashamed to say there are of our age and nature, who greedily close with this old objection, and eagerly maintain, that they were not made in the Image of the Living God, but of the Beasts that perish: Who heartily contend that it was not the Divine but the brutal likeness in which they were made ["created" is superscribed] and earnestly assert, 'that they themselves are beasts,' in a more literal sense than ever Solomon meant it. These consequently reject with scorn, the account God has given of man, and affirm it to be contrary to Reason and itself, as well as it is to their practice.

The substance of His account is this: 'God created man upright. In the Image of God created he Him; But man found out to himself many inventions, abusing the liberty wherein he was endowed.' He rebelled against his Creator, and wilfully changed the Image of the Incorruptible God, into Sin, Misery and Corruption. Yet his merciful, though rejected Creator, would not forsake even the depraved work of his own Hands, but provided for him and offered to him a means of being 'renewed after the Image of Him that created him.'

(p.3)

That it may appear whether this account of man is contrary to itself and reason or not, I shall endeavor to show the parts of it more distinctly, by enquiring: I. How man was made in the Image of God,

II. How he lost that Image, and

III. How he may recover it.

I. Man was originally made in the Image of God.

1. First with regard to his understanding he was endued after the likeness of his maker, with a Power of distinguishing truth from falsehood; Either by a simple view wherein he made the nearest approach to that all-seeing nature; or by comparing one thing with another (a manner of knowledge perhaps peculiar to itself) and often inferring farther truths from these preceding comparisons.

1. And in several properties of it, as well as in the faculty itself, man at first resembled God Himself. Understanding was just. Everything appeared to him according to its real nature. It never was betrayed in any mistake; Whatever he perceived, he perceived as it was. He thought not at all of many things, but he thought wrong of none. And as 2. it was just, it was likewise clear: truth and evidence went hand in hand; as nothing appeared in a false light, so never in a glimmering one. Light and darkness there were, but no twilight. Whenever the shades of ignorance withdrew, in that moment the broad day appeared, the full blaze of knowledge shined. He was equally a stranger to error and doubt; Either he saw 3. not at all, or he saw plainly and hence arose

(p.4)

that other excellence of his understanding. Being just and clear, it was swift in its motion. Nothing was then as quick as thought, but that which alone is capable of it, Spirit. How far anything of which we have any conception must fall short of expressing its swiftness, will be readily seen by all who observe but one instance of it in our first father: In how short a space he 'gave names to all cattle, and to the fowls of the air and to every beast of the field.' And names not arbitrarily imposed, but expressive of their inward natures. Sufficiently 4. showing thereby not only the swiftness, but likewise the greatness of his understanding. For how extensive a view must he have had, who could command so vast a prospect. What a comprehension was that, to take in at once almost an infinity of objects? Such doubtless it was, that the visible creation would soon have been too small for its capacity.

2. And yet even this just, this clear, this swift, this comprehensive understanding, was the least part of that Image of God, wherein man was originally made. Far greater and nobler was his second Endowment, namely a will equally perfect. It could not but be perfect while it followed the dictates of such an understanding. His affections were rational, even just and regular; If we may be allowed to say affections. For properly speaking he had but one: Man was

(p.5)

what God is, Love. Love filled the whole expansion of his soul; It possessed him without a rival. every movement of his heart was love. It knew no other fervor. Love was his vital heat; It was the genial warmth that animated his whole frame. And the flame of it was continually streaming forth, directly to Him from whom it came, and by reflection to all sensitive natures, in as much as they too were his offspring; But especially to those superior beings who bore not only the image super-scribed but likewise the image of their Creator.

3. What made his Image yet plainer in his human offspring was the liberty he originally enjoyed; the perfect freedom implanted, interwoven in his nature, and interwoven with all its parts. Man was made with an entire indifference, either to keep or change his first estate. It was left to himself, what he would do. His own choice was to determine him in all

things. The balance did not incline to one side or the other, unless by his own deed. His creator would not, and no creature besides himself could weigh down either scale. So that in this sense, he was the sole Lord and sovereign judge of his own actions.

4. The results of all these, an unerring understanding, an uncorrupt will and perfect freedom, gave the last stroke to the image of God in man by crowning all these with happiness. Then indeed, to live was to enjoy. When every faculty was in its perfection, amidst abundance of objects which infinite wisdom had purposely suited to it. When man's understanding was satisfied with truth, as his will was with good: when he was at full liberty to enjoy either the Creator or the creation; To indulge in rivers of pleasure, ever new, ever pure from any mixture of pain.

(p.6)

II. How was it this wise, virtuous, happy creature was deprived of these perfections. How man lost the image of God we are, secondly to enquire. And the plain answer is this: the liberty of man necessarily required that he should have some trial; else he would have had no choice, whether he would stand or not. That is, no liberty at all. In order to this necessary trial God said to him 'Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it.' To secure him from transgressing this sole command as far as could be done without destroying his liberty, the consequence was laid before him. 'In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.' Yet man did eat of it, and the consequence accordingly was death, on him and all his descendents, and preparatory to death, sickness and pain and folly and vice and slavery.

And tis easy to observe, by what regular steps all these would succeed each other, if God did not miraculously prevent it, but suffered nature to take its course. But we should observe first that man even at his creation was a compound of matter and spirit; and that it was ordained by the original law, that during this vital union, neither part of the compound should act at all, but together with its companion: That the dependence of each upon the other, should be inviolably maintained. And that even the operations of the soul should so far depend upon the body, that they so as to be exerted in a more or less perfect manner, as this was more or less disposed appropriately.

(p.7)

This being observed we may easily conceive how the forbidden fruit might work all those effects, which are implied in the word death, as being introductory to, and paving the way for it. It will which particulars of the following account are founded on Scripture and consequently certain, and which are built on conjecture and therefore proposed only as probable, it will not be hard to distinguish.

1. Its first effect must have been on his body, which being before prepared for immortality had no seeds of corruption within itself, and adopted none from without. All its original particles were incorruptible, and therefore additional ones taken in, being for pleasure rather than use, cannot be supposed ever to have cleaved to its native substance even to have adhered to any part of it, as none needed any reparation. By this means, both the juices contained, must have been still of the same consistence and the vessels containing them have kept the same spring; and remained ever clear and open.

On the contrary, the fruit of the tree alone of whose deadly nature he was forewarned, seemed to have contained a juice, the particles of which were apt to cleave to whatever they touched. Some of these being received in the human body, might adhere to the inner coats of the finer vessels, to which again other particles that before floated loose in the blood continue joining, would naturally lay a foundation

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for numberless disorders in all parts of the machine, for death in particular. Since more foreign matter cleaving to the former every day, the solid parts of the body would every day lose something of their spring, and so be less able to contribute their necessary assistance to the circulation of the fluids. The smaller channels would gradually fill up, especially those that lie near the extremities, where the current by reason of its distance from the fountain was always more slow and languid. The whole tide, as the force that threw it forward abated, must have abated its swiftness in proportion, till at length that force utterly failed, it ceased to move and rested in death.

Indeed, had Adam taken the antidote as well as the poison, had he again put forth his hand and taken of the fruit of the tree of life, nothing of this could have followed. Tis sure, this would have made him live for ever, naturally speaking, notwithstanding he had eaten death. Tis likely it would have done so by its thin, abstersive nature, particularly fitted to counteract the other. To wipe off its particles wheresoever adhering, and so restore the eater to immortality.

However this be, thus much is certain; the moment wherein the fruit was tasted, the sentence of death past on that body which before was impassive and immortal. And this immortal having put on mortality, the next stroke fell on its companion. The soul felt a like change to all his powers, except only that it could not die. The instrument

(p.9)

being now quite untuned, it could no longer make the same harmony. 'The corruptible body pressed down the soul, with which it soared so high during its incorruption.

2. His understanding first found the want of suitable organs. Its notions were just no longer. It mistook falsehood for truth, and truth for falsehood. Error succeeded and increased ignorance. And no wonder, when it was no longer clear; when it not only saw through a glass, but darkly too. That glass being now grown thick and dull, having lost great part of its transparency. And hence it was that doubt perplexed it as well as error, that it could neither rest in knowledge nor ignorance. Great clouds like these its most laborious steps could win but little ground. With its clearness went its swiftness too. Confusion and slowness came together. Instead of being able to find out the natures of 10,000 creatures almost in a moment, it became unable to trace out fully the nature of any one in many years. Nay, unable (so was the largeness of its capacity impaired, as well as the swiftness of its progress) with that apprehension for which the visible world was before not a scanty prospect, to take in at one view all the properties of any single creature therein.

3. How much the will suffered when its guide was thus blinded, we may easily comprehend. Instead of the glorious one that before

(p.10)

possessed it whole before, it was now seized by legions of vile affections. Grief and anger and hatred and fear and shame at once rushed in upon it. The whole train of earthly, sensual and devilish passions fastened on and tore it in pieces. Nay, Love itself, that ray of the Godhead, that Balm of life now became a torment. Its light being gone, it wandered about seeking rest and finding none, till at length, equally unable to subsist without any, and to feel out its proper object, it reclined itself upon the painted trifles, the gilded poison of earthly enjoyments.

4. Indeed, what else could the human mind do, when it had no freedom left? Liberty went away with virtue. Instead of an indulgent master, it was under a merciless tyrant. The subject of virtue became the slave of vice. It was not willingly that the creature obeyed vanity. The rule was now perforce. The scepter of gold was changed into a rod of iron. Before the bonds of love indeed drew him toward heaven, yet if he would, he could stoop down to earth. But now, he was so chained down to earth, he could not so much as lift up his eyes toward heaven.

5. The consequence of his being enslaved [sic] to a depraved understanding and a corrupted will could be no other than the reverse of that happiness which flowed from them when in their perfection. Then were the days of man evil as well as few. Then when both his faculties were decayed, bitterness poured on their earthly objects and heavenly ones withdrew.

(p.11)

The mortal, foolish, vicious, enslaved creature was delivered over to his sought for misery.

How such a creature as this, as every fair enquirer finds by experience himself to be, could come from the hands of the good God, has been the just wonder of all ages. And let the infidel look to it. Let him surmount the difficulty if he can upon any scheme beside the Christian. Upon this indeed it is no difficulty at all. All is rational, plain and easy. While we observe on the one hand that not the good God, but man himself made man what he is now, on the other, How he may recover what he wilfully lost, which is the subject of our third enquiry.

III. Who indeed shall recover us from the Body of this death? Who shall restore our native immortality? We answer with the apostle, 'I Thank God, Jesus Christ our Lord!' 'As in Adam all died, so in Christ shall all be made alive.' All who accept of the means which he hath prepared, who walk by the rules which he hath given them. All these shall by dying conquer the first death, and shall never taste the second. The seeds of spiritual death they shall gradually expel, before this earthly tabernacle is dissolved. That this too when it has been taken down and thoroughly purged, may be rebuilt 'eternal in the heavens!'

(p.12)

1. The first step to this glorious change is humility, a knowledge of ourselves, a just sense of our condition, which the evil spirit himself, either over-ruled by, or mimicking the true God, recommended on the front of his temple, in the celebrated words 'Know Thyself:' which a better prophet than he, recommends to all those, who would 'be transformed by the renewing of their minds.' 'I say to every man not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.'

Tis almost needless to remark How conducive this is to the attainment of all other knowledge. Or, in other words, how conducive it is to the improvement of the understanding. An erroneous opinion of ourselves naturally leads us into numberless errors. Whereas to those who know their own folly (besides the heavenly advantage of it) the Lord of nature 'gives the spirit of wisdom and enlightens the eyes of their understanding, after the likeness in which they were created.' (Eph. 1:17)

2. The understanding thus enlightened by humility, immediately directs us to reform our will by charity. To root out of our souls all unmanly passions, and to give place to them, no, not an hour. To put away all malice, uncleanness, intemperance, 'all bitterness, wrath and evilspeaking.' To collect the scattered beams of that affection which is truly human, truly divine, and fix them on that sovereign Good 'in whom we live, move and have our being.

(p.13)

For his sake, lastly and after his example, to be 'kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven us. Eph. 4:22.

3. Thus it is that the 'law of the Spirit of Life makes us free from the law of sin and death.' Thus it restores us first to Knowledge, and then to virtue and freedom and happiness. Thus are we 'delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the Sons of God: in that liberty which not only implies the absence of all pain, unless what is necessary to future pleasure, but such a measure of present happiness as is a fit introduction to that which flows at God's right hand forevermore!

One thing I would observe from what has been said. How extremely pitiable their condition is, who are insensible of their innate disease, or refuse the only cure of it. Tis true, even those who are not invested with authority (such doubtless bear not the sword in vain) are apt to look upon these as the proper objects of anger and not of compassion. Yet our Lord when he beheld even that city, which had killed the servants and was about to murder the son of its master, wept over it and suffered all other passions to melt down into commiseration. Yet those whom we are often tempted to behold with passions of quite another nature 'who are alienated from the Image of God, to the ignorance that is in them' are by our confession not more guilty than these and little less unhappy. They are always sick.

(p.14)

Destruction and unhappiness are in their ways. The way of peace have they not known. Often in pain. An evil disease cleaves to them. Their inward parts are very misery. Their understanding is darkened. Clouds of ignorance and error are ever before their eyes: 'because the god of this world hath blinded their hearts' and infinitely increased its native corruption. Their love is fixed on mean, perishing, unsatisfying objects and the frequent anguish that must flow from such a choice is sharpened by innumerable restless passions that tear asunder their helpless prey. God help him who is a slave to such masters. Man cannot. He can only pity him! He can only, when he seeth such a one dragging his chain and possibly talking loud of his own freedom, plunging to the flames of a fever, into those that never shall be quenched and perhaps dreaming he is in perfect health, recommend to that all sufficient ... mercy to which all things are possible.!

Yes, one step farther he may, he ought to go. He ought to acknowledge the riches of that mercy shown to himself, and indeed to all of us, who have our education in this place (a Christian country). Who have all the opportunities of obtaining a better mind, which the art of man and the wisdom of God can give. Of obtaining the knowledge [knowledge, the basis of whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are honorable or lovely_] [former brackets are Wesley's_] is held out to us in no sparing hand. We are suffered, courted, pressed to enjoy it. Others are glad if they can snatch a few drops from the rivulets that flow hence. We lie at the fountain and head of these living waters and command all their various streams. The attainment of knowledge is the pleasure of man. Of us, tis the business too. Our business it is to know

(p.15)

in particular that we are all originally foolish and vicious and that there is no truth in our whole religion more absolutely necessary to be known than this: Because if man be not naturally corrupt, then all religion, Jewish and Christian is vain. Seeing it is all built on this. All method of cure presupposes the disease. We can scarce avoid knowing how slight all objections against this fundamental truth must be, while there is even this one argument for it. If man be naturally mortal then he is naturally sinful. Secondly, one cause must work both sin and death. The seeds of nature being likewise the seeds of moral corruption, must undermine our understanding as well as our life and the affections with the understanding. We are almost forced to know both the necessity and the divine efficacy of our religion to see that if man be naturally corrupt, then Christianity is of God. Seeing there is no other religion as 'there is no other God, which can draw after this sort' from that corruption. We, lastly, have daily opportunities of knowing if Christianity be of God, than of how glorious a privilege are they thought worthy, who are the stewards of its mysteries and dispensers of its benefits! [superscribed: persuade others to accept of its benefits_] Seeing when the author of it 'comes in the clouds of heaven' and 'those that slept in the dust of the earth shall awake,' they who have wisely discharged this weighty trust (saved others from sin, and its attendant death) shall shine as the brightness of a firmament. They who have reprinted the Image of God on many souls, 'as the stars forever and ever'!

Now unto God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost be ascribed all Honor and Praise now and for ever.

transcribed, Nov. 1. 3:30 pm. 33 minutes

St. Mary's, Nov. 15, 1730

Queen's Square Chapel, London, Feb. 7, Stanton [1731]

St. Margarets, Old Fleet Street, London [July 30, 1732]

St. Miles [Oxford] Jan. 7, 1733.

APPENDIX THREE

WESLEY AND THE QUESTION OF PLAGIARISM

Throughout his life, Wesley made extensive use of other people's writings without necessarily giving credit, or even seeking their permission. For two examples, his Calm Address to the American Colonies (1775; Works Vol. XI, pp. 80-90) copied much of Samuel Johnson's Taxation No Tyranny, and his Thoughts Upon Slavery (the first half) was heavily dependent on Benezet's Some Historical Account. A comment is in order. Was Wesley simply a "plagiarist"? Stanley Ayling thinks so, and somewhat perjoratively adds: "He had come to regard all suitable writing as grist to his own . . . mill." (John Wesley, London, 1979, p. 283) By twentieth century standards this would be an accurate assessment, but an historical perspective adds a different dimension.

Brookes points out that Wesley lived in "a century of free plagiarism" (Friend Anthony Benezet, p. 84). Indeed, it is revealing to look at the men involved and see their reactions when their material had been copied. Samuel Johnson became aware of Wesley's use of his material but rather than showing any offence at this, he thanked Wesley for his "important suffrage," adding, "to have gained such a mind as yours may justly confirm me in my own opinions." (Letter from Johnson to Wesley, February 6, 1776; cited in Wesley, Journal [Curnock edition] Vol. VI, p. 67n. While it has been suggested that this was Johnson's magnanimous way of dealing with an obvious indiscretion, it is just as reasonable to accept his words at face value.

The fact is that causes tended to bind concerned persons together in a co-operative effort. This was certainly the case with antislavery and men who aligned in that cause, such as Benezet, Sharp and Wesley. They not only used, but abridged each others' works without troubling

to get permission. After abridging Sharp's Representation, Benezet wrote him in 1772, enclosing copies of his Some Historical Account encouraging its abridgment in England:

And I should have wrote thee thereon, had I known how to direct; particularly as I had taken the freedom to republish a part of thy acceptable, and I trust serviceable, treatise. But now, having a good opportunity, I make free affectionately to salute thee, and to send thee some copies of a treatise lately published here on that iniquitous traffick, giving the best account of its origin, progress, &c., we have been able to procure. I doubt not but it may be amended by some more able hand on your side of the water. We esteem the whole of thy treatise to be very instructive, and much to the point; nevertheless, it was thought, from the general disposition of the people here, that their attention was most likely to be drawn to it if limited to that part which immediately concerns us. I trust thou wilt excuse the freedom we have taken in abridging it, even tho' thou should not quite approve our reasons for so doing. (Benezet to Sharp, May 5, 1772, quoted in Brookes, op. cit., pp. 290-291)

Sharp's reply reflects his spirit of co-operation and good will:

You need not have made an apology for having abridged my book. It is a sufficient satisfaction to me to find that you thought it capable of doing some service in a cause which we have both of us much at heart.

I not only approve, sir, of the abridgment you have made of my arguments in particular, but of your whole performance. Some copies of it arrived here very opportunely, just before the case of James Somerset came to a hearing in the Court of King's Bench; and, by Dr. Fothergill's kindness, I was enabled immediately to dispose of six: one to Lord Mansfield, the Chief Justice, one to Lord North, first Lord Commissioner of the Treasury; and four to the learned Counsel who had generously undertaken to plead gratis for Somerset. I had thought indeed of reprinting it, as I did your former tract in 1768, but Mr. Clark, the printer, was luckily beforehand with me; so that I had opportunity of purchasing more copies to distribute. (Sharp to Benezet, August 21, 1772, quoted in Brookes, op. cit., pp; 418-19)

In regard to Wesley's Thoughts Upon Slavery, Sharp assisted Wesley when he decided to write (as mentioned in Chapter VII). Writing to Benezet, Sharp explained:

Some time ago the Revd. Westley [sic] signified to me by letter, that he had a desire to write against the Slave Trade; in consequence of which I furnished him with a large bundle of Books and Papers on the subject; and a few days ago he sent

me his Manuscript to peruse; which is well drawn up, and he has reduced the substance of the Argument respecting the gross iniquity of that Trade, into a very small Compass; his Evidence, however, seems chiefly extracted from the Authors quoted in your several publications. (This letter is quoted in Chapter VII p. 201, but bears repetition here in the context of the question of plagiarism. The letter is from Sharp to Benezet, January 7, 1774, quoted from Anstey, op. cit., p. 240.)

To Wesley, Sharp responded very favourably when he saw the manuscript: "I have perused, with great satisfaction, your little Tract against Slavery, and am far from thinking that any alteration is necessary" (for full letter, see Chapter VII, pp. 201-2, note 40) He sent two copies to Benjamin Rush (Brookes, op. cit., p. 447).

When Benezet saw Wesley's tract, he wrote:

The Tract thou has lately published entitled, Thoughts on Slavery, afforded me much satisfaction. I was the more especially glad to see it, as the circumstances of the times made it necessary that something on that most weighty subject, not large, but striking and pathetic, should now be published. Wherefore I immediately agreed with the Printer to have it republished here. (Benezet to Wesley, May 23, 1774, quoted in Brookes, op. cit., p. 318)

Benezet did have it reprinted and sent a copy to William Dillwyn, with the comment: "This contains interesting matters." (Brookes, op. cit., pp. 381-2, 396-7; 1783)

Wesley did not see himself as a literary creator so much as a promoter and communicator. His goal was to reach the common man, and he would do it as efficiently as possible. If something was good for the people, he felt responsible to share it, regardless of the source. The selection of the material and content of the argument were far more important to Wesley than the sources.

Unquestionably, by twentieth century conventions, Wesley would be considered a plagiarist. However, by eighteenth century standards,

he was a man driven by the desire to educate and persuade the masses on issues he considered to be crucial. A more in-depth analysis of the practice of the times and of Wesley's purpose indicates that he was acting as a co-operative member of a larger enterprise, making the best possible use of the available resources.

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